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Homeland (In)security:
Terminal Masculinity & the Specter of 9/11

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Homeland (In)security:
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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of
Emory University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in English
2010

Abstract

Homeland (In)security: Terminal Masculinity & the Specter of 9/11
By Nicholas D. Giannini

Homeland (In)security is a study of the 9/11 novel and post-9/11 U.S. cinema. It focuses on a series of literary texts from the early 2000s and on horror films of the past few years. In particular, this project considers each text as a narrative of rape speaking to and of white men. Unlike Lee Clark Mitchell's seminal claim of bodily violation as intrinsic to masculinity, *Homeland (In)security* proposes an effective *termination* of male identity by way of the crisis of traumatized survivorship. For contemporary U.S. authors such as Art Spiegelman, John Updike, and Michael Cunningham, the September 11 attacks represented an important opportunity to explore various recurring thematic interests—persecution, community, desire, patriarchy—within narratives colored by disaster. The inclusion of cinema here fulfills the following wishes: to map the so-termed "crisis" of masculinity onto one of society's most reflective (and informative) surfaces (i.e. Hollywood) as well as contribute to a field of genre criticism yet to be linked with masculinity. In short, it is my hope that the following essays help fill a gap in academic discourse by entwining gender, cinema, and literary scholarship with an event, as clinical psychologist Dori Laub has suggested, yet to unearth its public "voice."

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Acknowledgments

In many ways, I find it difficult to fathom this project as complete. For the past five years, the weight of writing a dissertation, not to mention embarking on a project as immediate as 9/11, hung about me like an ominous rain cloud. All too often, the temptation to walk away from this project was considerable. Two years later, I am pleased to finally put this project to the side. For that, I owe many thanks.

First and foremost, I would like to thank the Emory University Department of English and my advisor Walter Kalaidjian. Throughout the writing process, Walter's sage advice and words of encouragement consistently buoyed my spirits. Without him, none of this would have been possible. I would also like to thank then-Director of Graduate Studies Michael A. Elliott for generously allowing me the freedom to work in New York sans any department obligations. It is a courtesy I plan never to forget. In New York, I am eternally grateful to New York University and its remarkable libraries, Pace University (in particular Professors Walter Raubicheck and Steven Goldleaf), Columbia University (and the Butler Library's wonderful staff), The New York Public Library, The Museum of the City of New York, St. Paul's Chapel, The Center for Architecture and AIA New York Chapter, The National September 11 Memorial and Museum, The New York City Fire Museum, and Professors Diana Conchado, Richard Kaye, and Sarah Chinn of Hunter College.

At Emory, I would also like to thank Harry Rusche for his strength and jovial comradery; Barbara Ladd, for her rigor and support; Richard Rambuss, for so graciously stepping in on short notice; and Karla Oeler, for her expertise in film. Without question, each has proven an invaluable friend and confidant. Concurrently, I want to also acknowledge the following: Michael Altmann, Christopher Anskat, Samuel "Zeb" Baker, Harry Benshoff, Isadora Boucas-Neto, Jennifer Brady, Jean Paul Cauvin, David Faulds, David Fresco, Daniel German, Sander Gilman, Christine Gullotti, Constance J. Harding, Katie Harten, Kevin Heffernan, Bill Holden, Jennifer Hughes, James L. Hughes III, Justin Hurlacher, Emily Kader, Brenda Keane, Adam Lowenstein, Lisa Macklin, Irene Middleton, Manuel-Julian R. Montoya, Lauren Rule, Melissa Sexton, Aaron Sorg, Kara Tully, Maura Yates, Melinda Wilson. Brian Sikora deserves extra-special thanks.

Finally, I want to thank the members of my immediate family: Victoria Harding, Murray Gross, Preston Giannini, and Adrian Giannini. As I am constantly reminded by their words of encouragement, there are far more important things in life than dissertations. Thank you for seeing me through it.

This project is dedicated to my father, Steven P. Giannini. If only he were here to see it.

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"Between grief and nothing, I will take grief."
- William Faulkner, *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*

It is 9:05 AM on a Tuesday. In a Sarasota, Florida elementary school, the American President sits quietly in a classroom sipping a carton of milk and listening intently as a second-grade student reads *My Pet Duck* to a roomful of classmates and reporters. Amidst the flash of cameras, the President's gaze lingers squarely on the faces of the children. Each is quiet, attentive, tastefully dressed, and absorbed by the drama of the unfolding narrative. So too, it appears, is the Commander in Chief, as his softened expression and wistful grin implies escape into nostalgic reminiscence. On this otherwise idyllic September morning, the question of *futurity* rises swiftly to the fore, as we sense that here, under the watchful eyes of this sedate and paternal politician, the promise of national longevity emerges within these articulate, well-behaved individuals.

An agitated Chief of Staff enters the scene. "Mr. President!" he whispers urgently, "The planet is under attack by aliens!"—news which our nation's leader silently acknowledges but chooses, for the nonce, to ignore. Undeterred, the official presses

further with his warning: "Sir, they've already wiped out some of our cities. If nothing is done, they'll kill us all!" "I see," replies the irritated President, "Well, I'll handle that in a minute. Right now, I need to find out what's happening to this duck!" Visibly alarmed, the Chief of Staff plays his proverbial ace in the hole: "I've read the story before, Mr. President—*the duck dies*." "My God!" roars the alarmed politican, spewing milk onto the faces on the children. "That's horrible! You mean right now these children's parents could be *dead*?" And with that, the room explodes into chaos.

This parodic vignette, one of several from the fiercely irreverent *Scary Movie 4* (David Zucker, 2006), is intriguing for several reasons. On the one hand, the scene depicts the American President as an infantilized subject lacking diplomacy or a sense of professionalism. Simultaneously, he also represents a crisis in American manhood insofar as his fetishized status of being a "daddy, king, god, and hero" appears pregnant with dubious mastery.[1] Here, with a roomful of hysterical children up in arms about the safety of their parents, the role of the surrogate father as both protector and defender of the innocent appears, at least for now, horribly compromised by a tactless political buffoon. "I just don't get kids," remarks the President to his mortified aide, "Remind me to sign that abortion bill!"

An obvious instance of the film's acerbic left-wing politics, *Scary Movie 4* takes to task the oft-criticized behavior of a certain Connecticut-cum-Texas Republican, who, on the morning of September 11, famously "did nothing" whilst the nation descended into panic. Fresh on the heels of various other exposés lampooning Mr. Bush for his "curious" behavior that morning (Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* and Craig Unger's

[1] Linguist Robin Lakoff has made this claim, and it is quoted in Maureen Dowd, "Of Knights and Presidents: Race and Mythic Proportions," *New York Times*, 10 October 1992: 1.

The Fall of the House of Bush immediately come to mind), *Scary Movie 4* offers a unique political critique by imbuing the nation's leader with a form of ironic or "queer" desire. By queer, I mean both the etymological and politically franchised use of the term to which are affixed inflections of "strange," "absurd" or "abnormal" behavior resistant to normativity as such; as well as queerness's far more (post)modern association with homosexuality, intersexuality, or abortive (i.e. non-procreative) sexual expression. Seen in this light, *Scary Movie 4*'s President Harris (Leslie Nielsen) emerges as a figure of surprisingly acute abjection whose literal and figurative ejaculation (he cries out in horror and sprays semen-like fluid on the unsuspecting children) combines with an impromptu destruction of childhood fantasies (he tells the students that, in addition to their parents, Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, and the Easter Bunny no longer exist) to effectively rupture each child's insulating bubble which "protects" them from encountering the Queer.

In *No Future* (2004), Lee Edelman describes this process as *reproductive futurism* or the privileging of heteronormative sociability.[2] Turning his attention toward rampant homophobia and the mantle/menace of the nuclear family, Edelman takes issue with American culture's belligerent disavowal of non-reproductive or "perverse" sexualities. As an ideological construct, reproductive futurism demands the "absolute privileg[ing]" of heteronormativity by various social forces—the government, church, parents, schools—committed to "rendering unthinkable...the possibility of a queer resistance to [the] organizing principle of communal relations" (2). In this, Edelman proposes an implicitly negative dimension to community; which is to say, a tragically overlooked flipside capable of *alienating* a subject, and therein "affirm[ing] a certain structure"—in

[2] Edelman, Lee. No Future. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

this case, a wife, car, house, and kids—which ultimately figures the Child as *arbitrarily* "straight" or divorced from homosexual desire (3).

Scary Movie 4, despite its low-brow cultural positioning, is about the *rejection* of reproductive futurism by the very force—a Presidential force—which seems ethically bound to promote it. Far from actually inspiring these children, President Harris offers an affront to their formation. He represents, in other words, an inversion of values: a pedaphilic and therefore destructive presence whose apparent disregard for the nation's future implies not just the *secondary* arrival of some monstrous, inhuman Other (the alien invasion has of course already filled that social void), but also the spectacular failure of our nation's patriarch as a cool and collected pedagogical figure.

Clearly then, in light of what Susan Faludi has called the late-millennial "betrayal" of the American male, President Harris's horrifying albeit comical behavior alludes to an intriguing and as yet under-appreciated cultural development involving white male subjectivity and the post-9/11 condition.[3] No longer, I submit, are white male bodies sites of exclusive heroic performance. Instead, white masculinity—and it is specifically a *white* masculinity—has been altered—even queered—by an ethnic Other long forced to subsist within its shadow. But while much has been made about the racial significance and residual impact of the World Trade Center's collapse, little if anything has been said about 9/11's impact on contemporary masculinity and its ongoing fragmentary status. As such, what follows may be considered a literary and cultural studies project concerned with national memory, white masculinity, and the uncanny representation of trauma. I plan to argue here that much of the cultural work to emerge after 9/11—the still-unfolding genre of 9/11 fiction, mainstream and independent motion

[3] Faludi, Susan. Stiffed. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1999.

Figure 0.1*: Scary Movie 4* (David Zucker, 2006): A special visitor at Edna R. Penhall Elementary School. (Courtesy of Miramax Films)

Figure 0.2: *Scary Movie 4*: President Harris (Leslie Nielsen) reacts to the news of the fictitious duck's demise. (Courtesy of Miramax Films)

Figure 0.3: *Scary Movie 4*: The astonished students are showered with the President's milk. (Courtesy of Miramax Films)

pictures, theater, politics, popular television and song—is consciously and *sub*consciously concerned with white masculinity as the new face and race of terrorism. In this, I suggest both a crisis of (self-)representation on the part of numerous white male artists—authors, actors, musicians, and directors—as well as a robust if perhaps unwieldy agitation amongst a predominantly white male, middle-class spectatorship.

Part of my thinking is that post-9/11 America has become a culture of raped white men, a task which situates these figures as the contemporary body politic and implies a tacit acknowledgment of national unmanning. Unlike, however, the fantasy of feminization which arose following World War II and Vietnam (arguments famously held by Kaja Silverman and Susan Jeffords, respectively), *Homeland(In)security* argues for *irreparable* emasculation sans any long-term or sustained recovery. Masculinity, in a sense, is herein viewed as terminated or exhausted thanks to the temporal proximity in which many of this project's texts appeared as instances of *first wave 9/11 fiction*. In early 2005, when the backbone for this project first emerged in my graduate school application, the field of 9/11 fiction consisted of five, maybe six, mainstream titles of varying quality and import. Art Spiegelman's In *the Shadow of No Towers* and Michael Cunningham's *Specimen Days* were two of the earliest and recognizable titles. Since then, however, a number of books, including, just recently, Joseph O'Neill's vastly overhyped *Netherland* (2008), have since brought this once liminal fiction genre squarely to the fore of public consciousness.

Homeland (In)security is one of the earliest studies of its kind. And as such, in order to better suture and govern its overall structure, I have combined my interests in American studies, queer theory, and contemporary film to offer a timely (if perhaps

polemical) view of society. The focus of this study is men. Or more precisely, the fictive and filmic representation of white male bodies and their crisis of public performance. Rather than approaching this project as a book-length study, I have elected to craft a series of discrete articles that speak to one another as thematically congruent, but also capable of being read on their own. I find this strategy an effective tool in helping to synthesize and offer preliminary intervention in a genre still expanding and quietly evolving.

Though I preclude from my discussion the effects of 9/11 on women and ethnic minorities, I remain deeply indebted to two recent scholarly texts, Susan Faludi's *The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America* and E. Ann Kaplan's *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* as two early examples of feminist-minded post-9/11 critical discourse.[4,5] *Homeland (In)security*, in its analysis of male gender, shall earnestly engage with if not ultimately expand upon many of the ideas set forth in these texts, while also preserving, a la Sedgwick, the epistemic divides between masculine and feminine identity. It is my hope that in so creating a space of critical inquiry, successive studies and/or rejoinders will follow.

Chapter Overview

This project has four chapters. Chapter One—"Memento Mori"—considers the American graphic novel and aesthetic sublime in the context of September 11. I have selected Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2005) as a means of analyzing

[4] Faludi, Susan. The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2007.
[5] Kaplan, E. Ann. Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005.

how the writing of trauma both "de-scribes" one's experience to such a shocking event (an expression Maurice Blanchot invokes in *The Writing of the Disaster*) and *in*scribes a kind of partial citizenship undermining trauma theory's critical impasse; namely, of trauma as wholly "unrepresentable." More important, this chapter reads *Towers* as a narrative of white male rape wherein the bespectacled New Yorker imagines himself "opened up" by forces of historical wrath and raped by the ghosts of memory. Throughout the text, Spiegelman engages in a highly chaotic indeed intentionally disordered stroll through comic history in order to suggest a sexually assaulted speaker struggling to be heard above the aphasia of manifest disaster. Unlike his Pulitzer Prize-winning *Maus*, in which Spiegelman provided formal closure on the part of both his family and the reader as such, Towers transpires as an *inconclusive narrative* suffering from lack of (temporal, spiritual, psychic) distance and physical geographic remove.

Chapter Two—"Almost Famous"—takes us away from the streets of Manhattan and into the suburbs of northeast New Jersey, the setting of John Updike's lone 9/11 novel *Terrorist* (2006). In the text, amidst a steadily eroding landscape and diversified community, an aging male patriarch named Jack Levy expresses deep reservation over the state of his neighborhood and its recent inundation by "fat and tar." Disgusted with the influx of racial minorities and blight of broken homes (divorcees, life-long bachelors, teenage mothers and dead-beat dads), the sixty-three year old Levy finally decides his street could use a "good bomb." Though delivered in jest, Jack's acerbic observation in effect *colors* him as the novel's eponymous miscreant intent upon bringing down the house. Conflating Michel Foucault's theory of discipline and punishment with my own assessment of "queerness" in Updike's suburbia, "Almost Famous" describes how

elements of desire, rebellion, sadness and rage coalesce behind Jack—and even perhaps Updike—to form an ominous narrative of white (and Jewish) patriarchal resistance.

In Chapter Three—"'An Ecstasy of Murder'"—the entire United States is brought under scrutiny as the final narrative section of Michael Cunningham's *Specimen Days* casts a dystopic pall over a futuristic America defined by federal oppression. Beginning in New York City, Cunningham's novella expands into the "free zone" of New Jersey (patrolled by roving religious zealots and numerous conservative forces) and the "unpatrolled" terrain of Colorado, as the narrative's two main protagonists, a cyborg named Simon and lizard-like alien named Catareen, journey westward upon learning that both of their kind are marked for death by federal officials. "An Ecstasy of Murder" reads such ominous drama as both a thinly-veiled allegory of Patriot Act-era America as well as a speculative take of contemporary queer citizenship in the context of Cunningham's post-AIDS, post-apocalyptic social landscape.

My final chapter—"Global Specter, Global Menace"—is a lengthy examination of male subjectivity and the post-9/11 horror film. Beginning with a critical overview of Adam Lowenstein's Walter Benjamin-derived "allegorical moment," this chapter considers how post-9/11 horror attempted to reference the trauma of the terrorist attacks *vis-à-vis* narratives of white masculinity under duress. At once a marked departure from the typical gendered rubric of female exploitation at the hands of a masculine monster, contemporary horror, I argue, has managed to invert this paradigm by replacing a lone female subject with a terrified male who fights against the monster to preserve his life or save the planet. The question to be asked is *why*? Why has modern Hollywood embraced such strategy and entered into the realm of so-called "torture porn"? Why, for that matter,

has male subjectivity become a locus of anxiety in a genre long reviled for being sexist or misogynist? Through both in-depth analysis and cultural critique, I explore these and several other related questions in order to understand both the present-day status of American nationalism and the horror genre's continuing ethico-political evolution.

New York City
December 2008

1

Memento Mori

"And feel I, Death! no joy from thought of thee?
Death! the great counselor, who man inspires
With every nobler thought and fairer deed'
Death! the deliverer, who rescues man!"
- John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

On September 16, 2001, Karlheinz Stockhausen, the late German avant-garde composer and noted aesthete, infamously referred to the 9/11 attacks as "the greatest work of art for the . . . cosmos." When pressed for clarification, the Cologne-born composer wryly replied: "You have people who are that focused on a performance and then 5,000 people are dispatched to the afterlife in a single moment. I couldn't do that. By comparison, we composers are nothing. Artists, too, sometimes try to go beyond the limits of what is feasible and conceivable, so that we wake up, so that we open ourselves to another world."[6] For Stockhausen, the twenty-first century's inaugural trauma represented both an unprecedented feat yet to be fully comprehended, as well as a

[6] Spinola, Julia, "Monstrous Art: An Interview with Karlheim Stockhausen." *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 25 Sept. 2001. *osborne-conant.org*. Spinola, 25 Sept. 2001. Web. 28 Sept. 2008.

tragically illuminating "performance," or "open[ing] [up]," whose global ramifications helped further the debate of art's dialectical relationship to life.

The role of the modern artist, argued Stockhausen, is to educate the masses and disrupt their (un)conscious ennui. "When I discover something that is mysterious for me, new for me, and when I very carefully try to formulate it in sound, then it is certainly not the human side of myself which is touched," he once declared. "It is very strange to me. And I feel there is something that I don't know; I don't even know how to formulate it and to translate it into the instrumental world, whether in the electronic studio or with traditional instruments is secondary. The music which is composed by me and rehearsed many times and perfected in a lot of rehearsals very slowly creates feelings that I haven't had before. But it is not the expression of my feelings. So then I have new feelings. New music creates new feelings. It gives us completely different experiences that we haven't had before. That's why it is so important—it expands us."[7] Alluding, perhaps, to the May 29, 1913 premiere of Igor Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* as delivered to a packed—and soon riotous—Théâtre des Champs-Elysées, Stockhausen surmised that a musical composition is always already a work of "personal experience" that teaches both the artist and audience "to surpass the limits [of] imagination" in an effort to reach a point of awareness beyond "safe" or "permissible."[8] As was the case with his innovative repertoire, Stockhausen viewed Khalid Sheikh Mohammed's "masterful" composition as a highly *instructive* experience whose "great[ness]" and potency lent a powerful voice to hitherto silent or dispossessed subalterity.

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[7] Paul, David. "Interview with Karlheim Stockhausen." *Seconds* 44 (1997): 64-73.
[8] Eloy, Jean-Claude. "Unpublished 1987 interview with Karlheim Stockhausen for *Silence* magazine." *Stockhausen.org*. Stockhausen Foundation for Music, n.d. Web. 15 Oct. 2009.

Viewing 9/11 along such lines effectively resituates the artist as an agent of change or as a nexus of "transcendental idealism."[9] Within such Romanticized thinking, the artist—or in this case, conductor—is imagined as having "objectified" human life and treated his respective colleagues as unwitting pawns of some larger private fantasy—a fantasy, one might add, that further engenders a sense of patriarchy within its designs of didactic higher learning. Patriarchy's ideological presence within the "art" of terrorism is of particular interest here. And given this project's concern with post-9/11 masculine performance, this chapter shall examine how the 9/11 attacks successfully troubled—and potentially even queered—the nature of self-representation amongst men. As a way of structuring the discussion even further, what follows is a reading of Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004) as a confessionary narrative of perceived male rape.[10]

Within *No Towers*' fictive landscape, the aesthetics of memory coalesce behind a fascinating commentary on American masculinity's departure from a stoic, often-affectless sense of propriety so enacted by traumatic assault. Manliness, here defined by strong self-sufficiency and laconic mannerisms (a notion that Michael Kimmel, Jane Tompkins, and Lee Clark Mitchell have argued elsewhere[11]) plays a critical role in shaping what Spiegelman envisions as the strange "new normal" of post-9/11 America. Haunted by what philosopher Walter Benjamin imagines as "one single catastrophe" of modern history,[12] it is interesting to consider how the instances of temporal fluidity

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[9] Osborne, William. "Documentation of Stockhausen's comments re: 9/11." 22 Sept. 2001. *osborne-conant.org*. William Osborne, 22 Sept. 2001. Web. 15 Oct. 2009.
[10] Spiegelman, Art. In the Shadow of No Towers. New York: Random House, 2004.
[11] See in particular Chapters 3-5 of Kimmel's *Manhood in America* (Free Press, 1996); Tompkins' *West of Everything* (Oxford University Press, 1992); and Chapter 2 of Mitchell's *Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film* (Chicago University Press, 1996) for more details.
[12] In "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Benjamin memorably invokes a Paul Klee painting called "Angelus Novus" in order to describe the battering winds of history and time. "There is a painting by Klee called Angelus Novus," he writes. "An angel is depicted there who looks as though he were about to

within the text (of a return to the Japanese attacks at Pearl Harbor, the scourge and memories of the Holocaust, the series of nuclear age air raid drills that forced Americans to flee to shelter, or even the Depression Era utopia of early twentieth-century comic strips which spoke of happier days, sudden riches, and the promise that such hardship was "only a dream"), manage to "open up" the troubled narrator and frame him as a site of epistemological conflict and bodily violation. How, I suggest, does such privatized violence hypothetically alter western masculinity's social status? What observations, if any, might the reader adduce within such visually chaotic and arresting cultural text that attempts, as Spiegelman himself so notes, "a slow-motion diary of the end of the world"?

In the following section, I want to briefly outline Spiegelman's engagement with the comic book medium as a whole, and discuss how numerous literary critics have imagined this hybrid format as helpful in articulating (or inscribing) given trauma. From there, my discussion will turn towards Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Maus*, by focusing primarily on the project's structural nuances as a text of "second-generational" witnessing and closure. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a study of *In the Shadow of No Towers* as both a "primary" text of remembrance as well as a testimony of straight male rape—a condition which in turn might also extend to American society writ large.

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distance himself from something which he is staring at. His eyes are opened wide, his mouth stands open and his wings are outstretched. The Angel of History must look just so. His face is turned towards the past. Where we see the appearance of a chain of events, *he* sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet. He would like to pause for a moment so fair, to awaken the dead and to piece together what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise, it has caught itself up in his wings and is so strong that the Angel can no longer close them. The storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the rubble-heap before him grows sky-high. That which we call progress, is *this* storm." See Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History." 1940. Rpt in Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings. Vol. IV. Trans. Edmund Jephcott et al. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.

On Bleeding History

As a post-World War II aesthetic art movement, couched in the mold of the late-nineteenth century comic strip, the graphic novel's emerge in mainstream culture is often attributed to a select coterie of underground artists who sought to expand and revolutionize the medium. Once one of the most popular forms of entertainment early on in the twentieth century, comic books were seen as the quintessential populist art form with whom many a working class American could identify. "Comic books," declares cultural historian Badford W. Wright, "are ultimately a generational experience. For the most part, they are the domain of young people, who inevitably outgrow them, recall them fondly, and then look at the comic books of their children and grandchildren with a mixture of bewilderment and, perhaps, concern" (1). Each generation, Wright maintains, "writes its own history" in terms of the cultural paraphernalia surrounding their youth, and thus treats the numerous comic book titles available at the time as part of that cherished but soon distant identity.[13]

From the 1930s to the 40s, nationwide comic book sales and devoted readership totals were said to have reached their zenith. Millions of issues, many of them focused on the war in Europe or on nationalist-themed heroics, helped resituate the comic industry as a "serious" social enterprise capable of influencing—and for some, potentially "corrupting"—the minds of impressionable young Americans. Of particular concern to parents were the seemingly gratuitous instances of violence and/or eroticized imagery inundating much of the medium. Gone were the days when the slapstick humor and innocent worlds of characters such as Richard Outcault's "Yellow Kid," F. Opper's

[13] Wright, Bradford W. Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

"Happy Hooligan," and Winsor McCay's "Little Nemo" afforded newspaper audiences a momentary diversion and politically charged cultural critique. In their stead, darker and far more sinister tales of violence rooted in what University of Chicago professor Bill Brown has considered a "bad" modernist tradition of pulp fiction (*Action Comics*; *Spicy Western*; *Saucy Movie Tales*), crime noir (*Crime Does Not Pay*; *Underworld Crime*; *Justice*), horror, (*Weird Tales of Terror*; *Marvel Tales; The Vault of Horror*), suspense, smut, and war (*Attack!*; *Man Comics*; *Frontline Combat*; *The Fighting Yank*; *War*; and *The United States Marines*), all explicitly appealed to young male readers who saw such imagery as wondrously instructive.[14]

With the trauma of war finally concluding, and the nation about to enter a period of moral reform, the fates of gratuitous comic magazines to a dramatic turn for the worse. On October 26, 1954, a newly-formed group called the Comics Magazine Association of America announced the official inception of the so-termed "Comics Code" in an effort to better regulate and define the medium. Enacted in response to cries of unchecked moral indecency, the CMAA sought a more "responsible" final product that could educate and inspire young Americans. No longer, insisted officials, could comic books narratives depict "lurid, unsavory, [or] gruesome illustrations" of the darker side of human criminality. "The comic book medium, having come of age on the American cultural scene, must measure up to its responsibilities," began the Code's preamble. "Constantly improving techniques and higher standards go hand in hand with these responsibilities. To make a positive contribution to contemporary life, the industry must seek new areas for developing sound, wholesome entertainment." And in how scintillating fashion

[14] Brown, Bill. "Popular Forms II." The Columbia History of the American Novel. Eds. Emory Elliott; Cathy N. Davidson; Patrick O'Donnell, et al. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991: 357-379.

indeed. Among the many "positive contributions" so enacted was the complete elimination of "sympathy for the criminal" or detailed explanation of a crime; a clear or "visible reverence" for figures of authority, including police officers, judges, and parents; the inevitable triumph of good over evil, and of the law over criminal behavior; and finally, the privileging of the family—or more precisely, the pact of marriage—as a permanent and lifelong commitment.[15] As both Gerard Jones and David Hajdu have elsewhere lamented, in the post-World War II environment, comics were all but officially de-fanged.[16]

At the height of the 1950s, both the growing popularity of television and continued influence of the Comics Code Authority (CCA) effectively stripped the genre of its social eminence and left many artists scrambling for employment. The success of Superman, Batman, and Archie comics not withstanding, waning public interest in the medium not only made the market inhospitable to talented newcomers, but also brought some of the genre's most venerable names (namely Jack Kirby, Dick Sprang, and Wayne Boring) closer to the brink of retirement.

Those stubborn enough to remain in the field ended up relying upon independent comic presses and self-publication as a means of meager survival. Now more than ever, the challenge of finding original, exciting, and sensational new material was separating the wheat from the proverbial chaff.

In the 1960s, the bohemian politics of a nation in turmoil proved a breeding ground for comic innovation. In the celebrated circles of the avant-garde, Andy Warhol's

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[15] Excerpt from the Charter of the Comics Code Authority. Adopted October 25, 1954. *comicartville.com.* 25 Oct. 1954. Web. 28 Sept., 2009.

[16] See Jones, Gerard. Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, and the Birth of the Comic Book. New York: Basic Books, 2005; Hajdu, David. The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.

famed one-man exhibition on July 9, 1962 at the Ferus Gallery in downtown Los Angeles not only helped inaugurate the movement of experimental "pop art" as such, but also reignited public interest in the comic book genre as a viable form of cultural expression. In New York, the bold debut of Roy Lichtenstein's *Drowning Girl* (1963) and the dual-paneled *Whaam!* (1963), both of which were derived from individual comic book images released just one year before (the former, from DC Comics' *Secret Hearts* #83; the latter, from DC Comics' *All-American Men of War* #89), revealed a fascinating dialogic between the pixilated images of comic book printing presses and the movements of pointillism and abstract expressionism.[17]

Outside of such elite and prodigious company, the bohemian "comix underworld" of the time was also about to enter a new era of creative possibility. Unofficially headquartered in San Francisco's scenic (and progressive) Haight-Ashbury, the underground comix community found its first true avatar within the work of one Robert Dennis Crumb. A recent Cleveland transplant who first earned a living drawing note cards for American Greetings, Crumb quickly found fame with the 1968 publication of *Zap Comix* #1, for which he and Charles Plymell, the noted Beat writer, shared instant public acclaim. Sold on populated street corners from the back of the Crumb's second-hand (and presently occupied) baby carriage, *Zap Comix* quickly exhausted its 5,000 copy print run and earned the then-twenty-five-year-old artist a modest income. Crumb's impressive debut was unlike anything the art world had ever seen. Not only was it imagined as outside the purview of Comics Code Authority censors, but also as explicitly aimed at an adult intellectual readership and not, as was becoming increasingly the case,

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[17] For further information see Brown, Elizabeth, et al. Roy Lichtenstein: Prints 1956-1997. Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press: 2005.

various pimple-faced teen adolescents. In the words of cultural historian Todd Hignite, never before in the modern comic industry had such a debut been considered "more significant."[18]

Crumb's impact on the medium extended well beyond his maverick sensibilities. As a visual auteur, not only was he an innovator in planar texture, contour and surface, but also an unwitting savant at bridging "high art" modernism with "low brow" aesthetics in a manner that excited and inspired other colleagues. Deeply appreciative of the work of fellow underground cartoonists S. Clay Wilson, Rick Griffin, and Robert Williams, Crumb's own lengthy artistic formation came about vis-à-vis a deep appreciation of some of the industry's most respected Golden Age icons, chief among them L.B. Cole (the renowned golden age covert artist for *Suspense Comics* and *Contact Comics*), Harvey Kurtzman (a frequent contributor to *Mad*), Carl Banks (*Four Color Comics*) and Jay Disbrow (*Blue Bolt Weird Tales of Terror*; and one of the progenitors of comic noir). Each of these artists, all of whom saw comics as a noble and important social enterprise, helped influence Crumb's belief in distinctive affective overtones and an overarching view of comics as dialectical in nature. As one of the first major artists to incorporate numerous self-caricatures throughout his artwork, Crumb's "absolutely id-emptying cocktail of drug altered consciousness, anti-conformity, cultural alienation, sublimated sex and violence, spiritual transcendence and . . . delusion" transformed his seemingly innocuous brand of art into a self-conscious confessionary poetics that spoke to and for a readership hindered by repression. Throughout many of his various comic titles (*Big Ass Comics*, *Best Buy Comics*, *Keep On Truckin'*, *Snoid Comics*, *Motorcity Comics*, *Treasure*

[18] Hignite, Todd. In the Studio: Visits with Contemporary Artists. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006: 23.

Island Days, *Fritz the Cat*), the appearance of a small, thin, bespectacled individual named "R. Crumb" constantly reinforces the fact that the typically private and often laconic young artist considered his imaginary world as a realm or arena for the public working through of anxiety.

Never a particularly jovial artist (at least early on in his career), Crumb's persistently negative social focus frequently involved the weight of a straight white male performativity threatened by contemporary gender politics. Whether through hormonally crazed daydreams or a drug-induced haze, a seemingly boundless preoccupation with anal sex, monstrous genitalia, masturbation, fellatio, necrophilia, auto-erotic affixation, rape, "titty fucking," suicide and death seems intrinsically linked to Crumb's white male identity and status as *persona non grata*. At a time when second-wave feminism and queer liberation all but relegated white males to the sideline, Crumb's "socially engaged" artwork delivered a powerful rejoinder by acting out violent, frequently misogynistic private fantasies in an effort to help restore, even if only in theory, much of his male hegemony.[19] Throughout Crumb's universe, numerous creations such as the black Amazonian Angel Food McSpade and the uber-feminist, man-hating menace of Lenore Goldberg and her Girl Commandos were often targets of Crumb's lascivious sexual fantasies (the majority of them involving rape) and withering cultural critique: McSpade, for one, is a ten foot behemoth whose enormous breasts, rubbery lips, and ape-like profile pointedly reference a history of black-faced minstrelsy that Crumb, in posing as a literally diminutive and helpless male caricature, enjoys reasserting against the tide of civil rights. Goldberg, in the meantime, is depicted as a voluptuous and naked brunette—think Janis

[19] Hignite, Todd. In the Studio: Visits with Contemporary Artists. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006: 23.

Joplin on steroids—who runs around town assaulting police officers, clergymen, politicians, and "perverts" in an attempt to help reaffirm her social freedom. As the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser might attest, Goldberg's militant behavior clearly illustrates how the New Left's demands for gender equality and political freedom all but usurped the reign of ideological state apparati and left many such contingents gasping for their political lives.[20]

Unsurprisingly, many in the critical community found Crumb's humor caustic and uncomfortably political. According to genre scholar D.K. Holm, in "respectable" spheres of inquiry (namely, university art departments and national galleries), Crumb's incendiary content was deemed morally reprehensible and disruptive to the spirit of the nation's social progress. In the nation's capital, federal officials were even more upset. In 1969, on the heels of yet another successful issue of *Zap*, the Los Angeles FBI field office conducted a series of raids at Bay Area comic stores and seized dozens of unsold issues from the shelves. Charging the artist with public obscenity, federal officials contended that Crumb's sensational art had dangerously conflated the intellectual freedom afforded many in his profession with political propaganda and sadistic fantasies capable of inciting a riot. For the greater good, maintained officials, it was in the public's best interest to have the comic books confiscated and banned from distribution.

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[20] I refer here of course to Louis Althusser's seminal work on ideology and cultural representation. In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Althusser submits that the individual subject is always already inscribed as an agent of constant and inescapable "interpellation"—a process by which the aforementioned individual imagines himself as a socialized entity respectful of all laws governing society. The five main players within such a process are known as ideological state apparatuses (ISAs), many of whom, when not explicitly cited in bipartisan politics, are seen as sacrosanct or ineffable institutions: family, church, media, courts, and the realm of higher education. See Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological Status Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)." Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays. New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971: 127-186.

Interestingly enough, during a follow-up interview with Stu Glauberman of the *Berkeley Barb*, Crumb rather unexpectedly insisted that his art was far more "instinctive" in nature than consciously "political," as well as deeply "personal," and therefore rooted in absurdist fantasy, as opposed to, say, narratorial mimesis. "There's a lot of weird shit in everybody's head," he remarked philosophically, "Anybody could be a cartoonist if they could draw. The whole value of a cartoonist is to be able to bring it all out in the open. It takes courage to let it all out. And it's necessary so that we can all laugh at it all" (4).[21] Crumb's attitude toward the comic medium—of comics as an emotive realm or public sphere built upon the premise of collective experience—situates the art form as a largely liminal device that vacillates between political satire and irreverent filth in the eyes of its indoctrinated reader. At the same time, the vexed interiority of Crumb's identity—of being unattractive to women and easily intimidated—in effect helps depart from the rubric of hard-bodied heroes who broke hearts (and bodies) in their wake. In so reimagining masculinity via affective wealth and performance, Crumb's ground-breaking art emerged as a source of artistic inspiration and cultural bellwether for the genre's remarkable postwar transformation.

One of the artists most influenced by Crumb's lead was the New York-based cartoonist Art Spiegelman. A native of Stockholm whose family emigrated to America when Art was all but two-years-old, Spiegelman grew up in a Polish Jewish household in Rego Park, Queens amidst any number of Eastern European expatriates. Both of Art's parents, Vladek Spiegelman and Anja Zylberberg, were Auschwitz survivors who sought not only a reprieve from the horrors of their war-torn homeland, but also a nurturing

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[21] Glauberman, Stu. "Crumb Raps: An Interview with Robert Crumb." The Berkeley Barb. November 22, 1968: 9. Rpt. in R. Crumb Conversations. Ed. D.K. Holm. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2004: 3-5.

environment where their second (and only surviving) son could mature sans any threats of Jewish hate or persecution. Coming of age in the 1960s, Spiegelman's embrace of a modern American lifestyle all but alienated the young man from his Old World parents who had aged "well beyond their years" during the war.[22] Despite leading the life of "a pretty normal kid" all through high school, an emotional breakdown and hospitalization at age 20, led the aspiring artist—a graduate of the prestigious High School of Art and Design in New York City—to borrow a page from his genre predecessors and turn to comics as a form of catharsis. Despite deep enthrallment with the work of Carl Banks, Gary Panter, Will Eisner, and Jack Kirby, among others, Crumb's lifelong appreciation of R. Crumb had arguably the greatest single impact on his development. "Crumb is great," he once remarked during an interview with Gary Groth. "I really love what he does. I'm repulsed by some of it, but not by [the scope or passion of his work]."[23]

Like Crumb, Spiegelman's art delivers a stark, highly personalized narrative experience. His early contributions to magazines such as *Raw, Real Pulp, Short Order Comix*, and *Young Lust* were but preliminary sketches of sexual longing and/or desire in the mold of some of the former's most voracious yeoman efforts. Co-founding the now-iconic comics anthology magazine *Arcade* with Bill Griffith (of *Zippy the Pinhead* fame) in the 1970s, Spiegelman's engagement with the underground art world was now a full-time (i.e. immersive) occupation. In 1972, the release of a somber four-page comic called "Prisoner on the Hell Planet: A Case History" in *Short Order Comix* all but cemented Spiegelman's status as one of the nation's most important and indispensible graphic artists. "Prisoner," which recounts the suicide of the artist's mother and his father's

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[22] Weschler, Lawrence. "Interview with Art Spiegelman." 1986. Rpt. In Art Spiegelman: Conversations. Ed. Joseph Witek. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2007: 74.
[23] See Groth, Gary, "Interview with Art Spiegelman." *tcj.com*. The Comics Journal, n.d. Web. 8 Sept. 2009.

lengthy emotional breakdown, is imagined by Robert S. Leventhal as evidence of the artist's "own incomplete and failed attempt" at psychic mastery, given how, at the comic's conclusion, Spiegelman imagines himself as a wailing prisoner who has been "murdered" and abandoned by his mother (*Maus* 103).[24] "In 1968, when I was 20," explains Spiegelman, "My mother killed herself. She left no note" (100). For a young man, all but three months removed from a stay at the New York State Mental Hospital, the death of his mother acts as a confounding and surreal event seemingly absent any rhyme or social reason: "I could avoid the truth no longer—the doctor's words clattered inside me . . . I felt confused; I felt angry; I felt numb! . . . I didn't exactly feel like crying. But figured I should!" (101). Here, while reinforcing his words with panels of his own haggard face shedding a tear after lengthy hesitation, Spiegelman reveals both the powerful emotive disconnect between him and his Old World parents ("I didn't exactly feel like crying") as well as an illuminating glimpse, not unlike Crumb, of his own fractious and troubled subjectivity. Spiegelman's confessionary art, derived in part from lengthy exposure to poets such as Sylvia Plath and Robert Lowell, built upon many of the tenets initially fashioned by Crumb of comics as a realm of psychological introspection. What is more, the young Jewish artist also used the medium to interrogate the notion of *bearing witness to the process of witnessing* (Leventhal's words, not mine) via an "authentic" working-through of private trauma.[25]

Such stunning affective weight not withstanding, the use of the comic medium as a vehicle for bearing witness to trauma is perhaps most memorably etched within

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[24] See Leventhal, Robert S. "Art Spiegelman's Maus: Working-Through the Trauma of the Holocaust." *virginia.edu*. Robert S. Leventhal, 1995. Web. 12 Nov. 2009.
[25] See Leventhal, Robert S. "Art Spiegelman's Maus: Working-Through the Trauma of the Holocaust." *virginia.edu*. Robert S. Leventhal, 1995. Web. 12 Nov. 2009.

Spiegelman's two-volume epic *Maus*, the critically-acclaimed anthropomorphic memoir of his parents' riveting ordeal at Auschwitz. Captured with the help of a mediating pen, Vladek Spiegelman's tale of survival skirts a delicate line between historical veracity and aesthetic sublime in its quest to preserve tragic memory. In the eight to ten years since *Maus*'s release, responses to the text (and to the graphic novel more generally) have come to appreciate the medium as a "legitimate" form of art capable of representing social trauma. Almost to a man, *Maus*'s aesthetic viccisitudes has been read by critics—among them Robert Jay Lifton, Domnick LaCapra, Andreas Huyssen and James E. Young—as an ingenious way in which to circumvent the academic community's seemingly inevitable stance of trauma as "unrepresentable."

Huyssen in particular has noted that as a meta-fictional narrative "saturated with modernist techniques of self-reflexivity, self-irony, ruptures in narrative time and highly complex image sequencing and montaging," *Maus* offers a form of representational clarity as found within Theodore Adorno's notion of "mimetic approximation." Mimetic approximation, following Kristiaan Versluys' recent lead, recognizes the fact that traumatic events escape full linguistic (and/or oral) representation as part of their subscription to "untranslatable aseity" (988).[26] At the same time, such performative work also assumes that the traumatized witness "can mobilize so as to avoid the terror of memory, while yet reviving it for [both himself] and [others]"[27] as part of what Huyseen, channeling Adorno, believes, creates "closeness and distance, affinity and difference" in

[26] Versluys, Kristiaan. "Art Spiegelman's In the Shadow of No Towers: 9/11 and the Representation of Trauma." *Modern Fiction Studies* 52.4 (Winter 2006): 981-1003.
[27] Versluys, Kristiaan. "Art Spiegelman's In the Shadow of No Towers: 9/11 and the Representation of Trauma." *Modern Fiction Studies* 52.4 (Winter 2006): 988.

the eyes of the awestruck beholder (Huyssen 72).[28] In short, even while not achieving a fully sanctioned or documentary-esque "authenticity" of experience, mimetic langue, when properly used, allows for a serviceable mediated equivalent with which affect and ideology are conveyed.

Despite ostensibly reinforcing racist tropes within its depiction of Jews as mice, Germans as cats, Poles as pigs, and American armed forces as canines, *Maus* is perhaps best understood as a doubly-mediated attempt at "direct" engagement.[29] Spiegelman's text holds no punches in its depiction of the scope of Nazi brutality. Thousands of Jews, many of them children, are shown being slammed against walls, shot in the head, herded into gas chambers, or left as carrion for packs of wild dogs. Such shocking representation, while potentially gratuitous, helps fill a need within the Jewish community of reinforcing (or in some cases maintaining) the collective memory of ethnic persecution. To be Jewish, once joked the comedian Adam Sandler, is to think of oneself as never too far from a racist punch line. A fact that Jewish historian Dora Apel also acknowledges within her recent claim that each self-respecting Jew now face the task of not letting the Nazi scourge slip into obscurity.[30] As Jews, she maintains, we are

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[28] Huyssen, Andreas. "Of Mice and Mimesis: Reading Spiegelman with Adorno." *New German Critique* 81 (Fall 2000): 65-82.

[29] During an interview with Gary Groth in 1988, Spiegelman, when asked to explain his initial motivation for Maus, responded with the following: "First of all, I've never been through anything like that—knock on whatever is around to knock on—and it would be a counterfeit to try to pretend that the drawings are representations of something that's actually happening. I don't know exactly what a German looked like who was in a specific small town doing a specific thing. My notions are born of a few scores of photographs and a couple of movies. I'm bound to do something inauthentic. Also, I'm afraid that if I did it with people, it would be very corny. It would come out as a kind of odd plea for sympathy or "Remember the Six Million," and that wasn't my point, exactly, either. To use these ciphers, the cats and mice, is actually a way to allow you past the cipher at the people who are experiencing it. So it's really a much more direct way of dealing with the material." See Groth, Gary. "Art Spiegelman and Francoise Mouly." The New Comics. Eds. Gary Groth and Robert Fiore. New York: A Berkley Book, 1988: 190-91.

[30] Apel, Dora. Memory Effects: The Holocaust and the Art of Secondary Witnessing. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002: 4.

expected to *welcome* such memory—indeed acknowledge its specters—in order to help influence or inform future generations.

And yet given Theodor Adorno's claim about the barbarism of poetry after Auschwitz, this seemingly honorable task of "remembering" the Holocaust appears far more vexed than initially imagined. Those in favor of formally aestheticizing the ordeal contend that the Nazi desire to strip each individual Jew of his or her personal identity is effectively reversed within a given narrative's ability to humanize the Jews and augment their darkest hour as a race. (Eli Wiesel's *Night* and Primo Levi's *Survival at Auschwitz* are two primary examples.) Elsewhere in this debate, a number of voices have also insisted that such unrivaled persecution—including but not limited to the Holocaust as such—is a fundamentally *private* experience felt solely by the Jews and therefore unfit for general mass reception. Depicting such horrors across formal boundaries ultimately cheapens the affair in the eyes of naysayers and further denies the Holocaust its unique historicity. However one chooses to fall on this divide, the fact remains that modern American culture continues to view the Holocaust as a battle-scarred, though fungible social muse. Indeed, as noted Hollywood executive and childhood Holocaust survivor Meyer Gottlieb recently quipped: "The Holocaust has 6 million compelling stories, and Hollywood is always desperate for a good story."[31]

At a particular point in time when films such Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) or televised dramas *Never Forget* (Joseph Sargent, 1991) and *The Witness* (Chris Gerolmo, 1992) were accused of excessive or overt sentimentality, Spiegelman's *Maus*, despite its flamboyant composition, succeeded in avoiding such heated criticism by

[31] Quoted in Tugend, Tom. "Holocaust films keep coming, despite prediction of their demise." *The Jewish Telegraph Agency*, 14 Aug. 2009.

refusing to trade history for popular fiction (of which *Schindler's List* is oft-accused) or sensationalism for understated drama. "Ultimately, what the book is about is the commonality of human beings," declared the author. "It's crazy to divide things down the nationalistic or racial or religious lines. And that's the whole point, isn't it? These metaphors [of mice, pigs, cats and dogs], which are meant to self-destruct in my book—and I think they do self-destruct—still have a residual force that allows them to work as metaphors, and still get people worked up over them"[32]; all of which is to say that Spiegelman purposely drew *Maus* with the intent of setting aside all proscriptive or *de rigueur* ideological conceits in order to offer a stark though of course still mesmerizing tale of survivorship, easily accessible to all.

In *Maus*, one of the narrative's most fascinating elements is how Vladek's will to persevere occupies a transitional space between personal experience (or private thought) and a public act of remembering. Indeed at one point in the text, Vladek's story of how he left his girlfriend Lucia for Anja Zylberberg, his future wife, is interrupted by Vladek's request that Art not write about such behavior out of respect for his personal "priva[cy]" (23):

> Vladek: 'It has nothing to do with Hitler, with the Holocaust!'
>
> Art: 'But Pop—it's great material. It makes everything more real—more human.'
>
> Vladek: 'But this isn't so proper, so respectful….I can tell you other stories, but such private things, I don't want you should mention.'
>
> Art: 'Okay, okay—I promise.' (Spiegelman 23)

[32]Bolhafner, Stephen. "Interview with Art Spiegelman." *The Comics Journal* 145 (October 1991): 96.

This fleeting exchange, occurring as a sudden irruption in the narrative thread, acts as both a self-evidentiary marker of temporal slippage (of the present "intruding," as it were, upon the past), as well as a striking reminder of the project's overall status as a monument or *lieu de memoire*. Pierre Nora's famous postulation is applicable here when considering how *Maus* readily exemplifies a "significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of [a given] community"—namely, the Jews.[33] In *Maus*, after all, Vladek's journey toward freedom, while still very much a *personal* triumph of the will, is consciously seen throughout his son's so-termed "natural" artistic medium as emblematic of that of *every other* captured Jew in Eastern Europe. More than anything, Vladek's emotional triumph is a tale whose pedagogical importance trumps even that of the speaker's own honorable wish "to forget" all such horrors in the first place[34]: "No one wants anyway to hear such stories," explains Vladek to Art. "Better you should spend your time to make drawings what will bring you some money" as opposed to, say, a host of sleepless nights and or nightmares (*Maus* 12).

A tragic instance of what Shoshana Felman has considered the yoke of the "unwilling" witness, Vladek's traumatized subjectivity, despite being aligned *with* other Auschwitz survivors, actually embodies, in Felman's words, "a radically unique,

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[33] Pierre, Nora. "From lieux de mémoire to realms of memory." In Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past. Vol. 1: Conflicts and Divisions. Eds. Pierre Nora and Lawrence D.Kritzman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996: XVII.

[34] During an interview with Rafael Pi Roman of *NY Voices*, Spiegelman noted the following: "*Maus* was done in comics form because I make comics and so it was the natural language for me to speak. Comics have to do with art like Yiddish has to do with language; it's a kind of vernacular. And so *Maus* was essentially a natural means for me. The reason I mentioned these precedents before, by the time I was working on *Maus* it seemed like a rather natural thing to do. It wasn't like ... do it in comics, that will get really a rise out of somebody. And I know that the responses to *Maus* when it came out were first great suspicion. And then as they got closer, people who were serious about the issues that lie at the heart of *Maus* weren't offended by its form; they just found that that could work. And that's essentially what's interesting to me." See Pi Roman, Rafael, "Interview with Art Spiegelman." 1999. *Thirteen.org*. NY Voices, n.d. Web. 23 October, 2009.

noninterchangeable and solitary burden" for which the witness is solely responsible (3).[35] "To bear witness," she explains, "is to *bear the solitude* of a responsibility, and *to bear the responsibility*, precisely, of that solitude. And yet, the *appointment* to bear witness is, paradoxically enough, an appointment to transgress the confines of that isolated stance, to speak *for* other and *to* others" from what is considered a stance of perceived enlightenment (3).

In *Maus*, the scourge of the Nazi cleansing is seen as a totalizing ordeal from which Vladek and his peers sense no tangible escape. "It was many, many such stories," recalls the elder Spiegelman with dismay, "synagogues burned, Jews beaten with no reason [*sic*], whole towns pushing out all Jews—each story worse than the other" (33). Amidst such escalating fear and tension, death for the Jews was housed within the imposing black swastikas stationed throughout Europe and the unseen but nevertheless dreaded specter of Auschwitz from which thousands "never came anymore home" [*sic*] (91). In a very literal sense of the term, the face of death for many such Jews maintained a static and largely finite definition within the billowing stacks of smoke spewing human ashes like "a poisonous dark-green bruise" over the skyline.[36] "And we came here to the concentration camp Auschwitz," recalls Vladek, "And we knew that from here we will not come anymore…we knew the stories—that they will gas us and throw us in the ovens. This was 1944…we knew everything. And here we were" (157).

"K[nowing]" "everything" in this case rather unexpectedly affords Vladek a sense of peace and moral closure in the narrative. Not only does Auschwitz's immutable black

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[35] Felman, Shoshana. "Education and Crisis." Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History. Eds. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub. New York and London: Routledge, 1992: 1-56.

[36] Radnoti, Miklos. "Clouded Sky." 1940. Trans. Steven Polgar, S. Berg & S. J. Marks. In Holocaust Poetry. Ed. Hilda Schiff. New York: Harper Collins, 1995: 24.

gate represent the demise of each prisoner's lifespan, but also the uncanny arrival of living death (or possibly even death in life) as housed within the carcass of the so-termed *muselmann*. Thanks to both its well-defined enemy (the Nazis) and truncated theaters of war, World War II's tragic emergence, when viewed in retrospect, can be summarily understood as an eminently *containable* affair aided by the mediating mechanisms of time. How else but as a result of the temporal distance separating May 1945 from Spring 1972 (when a three-page strip of *Maus* first appeared in the underground comic magazine *Funny Animals*) could one explain the Messianic arc contained within *Maus* that literally unfolds across a left-to-right telos, and in terms of the past leading straight into the present? As a highly stylized narrative art that mimics most if not all of the comic book conventions (individually drawn cells, thought bubbles, interludes, recurring characters), *Maus*'s reliance upon a genre rubric to effectively commemorate the dead (one might choose to think of each cell as the face or disembodied voice of the Jewish victims), simultaneously speaks *to* the casual reader by accessing a familiar—and indeed once pleasurable—spectatorial experience, while also eloquently preserving *for* the surviving victims the souls of the dearly departed. Ultimately, *Maus* is a text that draws life out of a veritable continent of endless death. In the text, Spiegelman sees himself as less a chronicler of death than an avatar of hope and rebirth. Vladek's testimonial, along with Anja's private writings (the latter of which Vladek discarded in a fit of sorrow), represent, for Spiegelman, an individual life toward which he, as an artist, feels beholden. His subsequent fury at Vladek for destroying Anja's diaries ("God damn you! You—you murderer! How the hell could you do such a thing"), brings to a head the conviction that

the narrative crafting of testimonial signifies to Art a final resting place or headstone within which traumatic history is solemnly interred (*Maus* 136).

Apocalypse Now

Suffice it to say, the ethics of representation are on full display within a work as complex and nuanced as *Maus*. But can a similar claim also exist within Spiegelman's tribute to September 11? For starters, let's consider how *In the Shadow of No Towers* differs markedly from its predecessor in two very important ways: its approach to trauma as a "limit event" and of its amplified engagement with attendant cultural politics.[37] If *Maus* is to be imagined as formal closure for an aging generation of survivors, *Towers*, by contrast, is an open-ended response to the trappings of the traumatized present. Forged in the attack's immediate proximity (the lower Manhattan neighborhood of Soho to be exact) and at the dawn of the War on Terror (initial proofs were completed as of early 2002), Spiegelman's highly impressionist text hinges upon his role as a "ringside" witness to "the start of the end of the world" (1). "Disaster is my muse," he observes at one point in the prologue. And the City of New York, a land that the long-time resident can "honestly call home," is his uncanny canvas—a site both foreign yet familiar—within whose tenuous confines the author feels frightened or "easily unhinged" (1).

As the esteemed man of letters E.B. White once declared: "On any person who desires [to receive] such queer prizes, New York will bestow the gift of loneliness and the gift of privacy"—a remark that Spiegelman, as a self-described paranoiac, might readily submit, informs much of his myopic social purview. Published in serial format from

[37] Kristiaan Versluys defines this term as "an event so traumatic that it shatters the symbolic resources of the individual [artist] and escapes the normal processes of meaning-making and cognition" (981).

2001-2003, *Towers* takes shape as an intimate and often discombobulated exposé of a "rooted" New Yorker's unchecked concern for the health of his home and loved ones. Released in book-length format in late 2004, *Towers* consists of ten-broadsheet-sized comic pages filled with vintage American comic strips, historical newspaper clippings, political satire, personal rumination, and a dizzying array of cultural paraphernalia that highlights the underlying chaos of Spiegelman's most demonstrative and expressive project yet. "Doomed!" he declares early on in the text. "Doomed to drag this damned albatross around my neck and compulsively retell the calamities of September 11 . . . ! I insist the sky is falling; they roll their eyes and tell me it's only Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder . . . That's when time stands still at the moment of trauma . . . which strikes me as a totally reasonable response to current events" (2).

Trapped in a moment he sees as infinite and fraught with peril, Spiegelman imagines himself as part of what is now the strange "New Normal" of modern America: a landscape where *sturm und drang* news outlets and the repetitious imagery of burning towers put the American people constantly on edge. "In our last episode," begins the narrator, "as you might remember, the world ended." And in what spectacular fashion indeed: "Maybe it's just a question of scale," remarks Spiegelman, but "even on a large TV, the towers aren't much bigger than, say, Dan Rather's head," which, after decades of entering American homes in a familiar and often mediating capacity, now brought something foreign and unnatural to bear.

Beginning his project with reference to a non-existent "episode" of social apocalypse not only establishes a sense of breakneck pacing meant to mimic the exacting social conditions of the moment, but also of a historical slippage—or return perhaps—to

an era when serialized news reels and newsstand comics books (both of which Spiegelman enjoyed as a youth) summarily educated and entertained the masses. The use of such rhetoric seems easily explained as a way of affording the artist some much-needed personal catharsis. As recent remarks by Erin McGlothlin, Marianne Hirsch, and Hillary Chute have each recently concluded, Spiegelman's "slow-motion diary" of trauma, despite being "radically different—and perhaps less appealing—than the powerful, narrative *Maus*,"[38] pivots upon a familiar theme of the genre's efficacy for representation and its conduciveness to recuperative possibility.[39] "In *No Towers*," explains Chute, "comics are presented as the only way to organize the fragmented, discursive structure of paranoia and trauma. Working on *Maus*, Spiegelman referred to comics panels as "coffins"; here, in *No Towers*, they are windows, and the book, while detailing the crumbling of the towers, also rebuilds them in its basic graphic procedure: there is a *formal* recuperation at work—a kind of *re*-fenestration—without the all-too-easy physic recuperation counseled by mainstream redemption narratives" (236-237).

Had *Towers* appeared some five to ten years after the attacks, one might be inclined to treat Chute's position far more favorably. As it is, with numerous publications such as *The Jewish Forward*, *The London Review of Books*, *The L.A. Weekly*, *Internazionale*, *Die Zeit*, *World War Three Illustrated*, and *The Chicago Weekly* all presenting portions of the project within a matter of months or even weeks of 9/11, the idea that such raw, unadulterated stream of consciousness could connote an act of "formal recuperation" seems, at the very least, slightly premature, if not also perhaps

[38] Chute, Hillary. "Temporality and Seriality in Spiegelman's In the Shadow of No Towers." *American Periodicals* 17.2 (2007): 228-244.
[39] Chute, Hillary. "Temporality and Seriality in Spiegelman's In the Shadow of No Towers." *American Periodicals* 17.2 (2007): 236.

wishful thinking. While not entirely discounting Chute's position of comics as a way of "organiz[ing]" the author's thoughts, I want to significantly depart here from her claim of imaginary closure and focus instead on the possibility that in so promoting the idea of time "stand[ing] still," Spiegelman has entered an imaginary prison wherein the promise of escape or resolution is denied. What such a bold possibility entails, in turn, is that unlike other redemption narratives that attempt a symbolic restoration of wholeness, *Towers* invites the possibility of *irreparable violation*—which is to say, of devastation writ large—culminating in a reading of Spiegelman as a victim of rape.

Rape, as feminist scholar Susan Brownmiller has explained, connotes "a sexual invasion of the body by force" from "several avenues" and/or "methods" of engagement.[40] Many of these engagements stem from a tradition of male-dominated, materially driven proprietorship in which the policing of women—and more precisely, the vagina as such—is described as hurtful, problematic, and, for more than a few contemporary feminists, institutionalized to a point of clear disrepair. Andrea Dworkin, following Brownmiller, has also argued that insofar as acts of rape are rooted in a locus of power and physical dominance, the unwelcome violation of the female body by her male aggressor is imagined as having far less to do with sexual desire than the desire to impose one's will unequivocally.[41] In the twentieth-century courtroom, rape is defined as the "forcible penetration of the vagina by the penis, however slight."[42] But to say that rape is therein exclusively a *heterosexual* offense is of course only half the story. Male on male rape, viewed by modern day society as an act of perversion or moral insolvency

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[40] Brownmiller, Susan. "Women Fight Back." Feminist Theory: A Reader. Eds. Wendy Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski. 2nd Edition. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005: 258.
[41] Dworkin, Andrea. Pornography: Men Possessing Women. New York: E. E. Dutton, 1981: 19.
[42] Susan Brownmiller offers this legal definition in her study on women and rape. See above.

(crimes against women, in contrast, are seen as ultimately "normal" though reprehensible acts), remains prevalent in certain environments where heterosocial interaction is deemed otherwise unsafe for the normal everyday flow of interaction (prisons, church, boarding schools, etc.). Accordingly, while the bulk of male-male rape studies have focused predominantly on prison sex and gay male pedaphiles, seldom if ever is the notion of raped white men brought to bear upon September 11.

Insofar as rape's social codification entails "a deliberate violation of emotional, physical and rational integrity," it becomes possible here to imagine Spiegelman's text as tangentially akin to, say, Pecola Breedlove's disintegration in *The Bluest Eye* (1970) or even the disembodied plight of fourteen-year old Susie Salmon ("like the fish") in Alice Sebold's debut novel *The Lovely Bones* (2002). As one of the earliest aesthetic projects to emerge after the attacks, Spiegelman's response to such a deliberate and hostile invasion, struggles, much like *The Bluest Eye*, with the question of narrative coherence. In Morrison's novel, the syntactical slippages of the opening page ("Hereisthehouseitisgreenandwhiteithasareddooritisverypretty…") coalesce with an uncanny return to the grammar school adventures of William S. Gray's *Sally, Dick, and Jane* to reflect the traumatized protagonist's damaged and depressed emotional state. Pecola, we soon discover, has been raped by her lustful father Cholly, described as a "burned-out" black man who simultaneously experiences "revulsion, guilt, pity, then love" for his "young [and] hopeless" eleven-year-old (161).[43] Scarred by such harrowing trauma, Pecola's eventual fetishization of both Cholly and her family ("See Mother. Mother is very nice. Mother, will you play with Jane? Mother laughs. Laugh, Mother, laugh. See Father. He is big and strong. Father, will you play with Jane? Father is

[43] Morrison, Toni. The Bluest Eye. 1970. New York: Penguin Books, 1994.

smiling. Smile, Father, smile.") becomes a highly aestheticized (and initially confounding) confessional moment seeming resistant to or beyond public coherence.

In the Shadow of No Towers offers a similar thematic. It too is concerned with discussing the aftermath of rape in terms of individual consternation. But whereas Morrison's text is committed to presenting the vicissitudes of loss through language, *Towers* proposes a far less formalized approach in its quest to construct a narrative. Let's begin with an analysis of *Towers*' title page. In its center, a six-inch circle containing one of the burning towers instantly commands our attention. Surrounding this image is a full-page reproduction of the *New York World* from September 11, 1901. Its headline reads: "President's Wound Reopened; Slight Change For Worse." According to the paper, Republican President William McKinley, Jr., then in the final year of his first appointed term, had complained to physicians earlier that morning of mild "irritation" in his back and upper torso. Five days earlier, on the heels of a much-hailed policy speech at the Pan American World's Fair in Buffalo, New York, President McKinley was shot twice by noted anarchist Leon Frank Czolgosz, while the former was greeting legions of supporters. The first of Czolgosz's bullets pierced McKinley in the upper shoulder. The second, a far more serious wound, entered his stomach, lacerated a kidney, and lodged deep within the President's back. Miraculously, McKinley's health and demeanor remained positive.

Attending physicians found success in removing the first of the offending bullets; however, their subsequent inability to so much as locate the second bullet was cause for immediate alarm. Fearful that further surgery could ultimately hinder the President's recovery, medical personnel decided to leave the second bullet in place and hope that no

further complications would arise—a decision that McKinley biographer Lewis L. Gould believes eventually cost the President his life.[44]

Figure 1.1: The title page of *Towers*. (From *In the Shadow of No Towers* by Art Spiegelman, ©2004 Random House.)

Ever the scholar of American history, Spiegelman's decision to reference McKinley's death is intriguing for several reasons. On the one hand, the assault of an American president is typically seen as an attack against the nation and her citizens as such. Accordingly, at the turn of the century, not only were Americans concerned about the health of their bed-ridden leader, but also about the alarming possibility of future assaults—whether foreign or domestic—against a nation now viewed as vulnerable. In

[44] Gould, Lewis L. The Presidency of William McKinley. Lawrence, KS: Kansas University Press, 1981.

the ensuing months, a nationwide crackdown against individuals and groups believed to be supportive of anarchist persuasions (highlighted, of course, by the arrest of the notorious social activist Emma Goldman) reflected not simply an emboldening by officials to preserve the tenets of homeland security, but also an entrance into an era of Orwellian histrionics of whose caliber the nation and its people had yet to see.

Spiegelman's America, while absent any trauma or wounding of the President, holds a similar set of nationwide anxieties. At a time when elevated security threats, race-based hate crimes, building evacuations, subway closings, even "randomized" searches of luggage were deemed part of a newly improved and sanctioned (!) quality of life, *In the Shadow of No Towers* deliberately challenges such conceits of America as safer, "stronger" or "more prepared" than ever by working, in circuitous fashion, around issues of outrage and confusion that pertain to the author's mental "tizzy" (1). In addition to reading McKinley's death as part of a broader, more tragic historical continuum, one can further consider how the arduous "reopen[ing]" of the President's wound—and really, his bodily violation as a whole—is implicitly acknowledged in terms of the author's own perceived violation and fear of impending mortality. Indeed, thanks in large part to its placement at the center of *Towers*' title page, the ring-like circle constricting the burning trade tower may herein draw significance as a metaphor for the author's own recently invaded "hole" or anus—after all it is technically within this circle's governing confines that the twin specters (towers?) of death and trauma are simultaneously housed and relived ad nauseam. (At the top of the second broadsheet, a harried-looking Spiegelman laments how he is "Doomed! Doomed to drag this damned albatross around my neck and compulsively retell the calamities of September 11 . . . !") In short, like a bad case of

psychic diarrhea, such excruciating trauma, in its unwelcome return, leaves the author feeling weak and ill at ease.

For Spiegelman, part of the challenge in working through 9/11's vicissitudes is learning how to cope with issues of personal identification and self-worth. This, as numerous clinical studies have shown, is part of an arduous and often unpredictable psychic process widely envisioned as fundamental to the victim's recovery.[45] Personal insecurities, conjoined with depression, suicidal ideation, substance abuse, and sexual dysfunction are frequently reported throughout any number of victim populations. In the particular case of rape, the feminist voices of the 1970s, along with the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) official recognition of post-traumatic stress disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders of 1980* (DSM III), helped augur a sociopolitical and legalistic redefinition of "rape trauma syndrome" as a legitimate and legally *quantifiable* physical disability.

Rape trauma syndrome, a phrase introduced in the landmark studies of Ann Wolbert Burgess and Lynda Lytle Holmstrom, was initially used to help identify post traumatic stress disorder within 81 female victims who complained of being unable to function "normally" in everyday life.[46] In their findings, Burgess and Holmstrom reasoned that each of their subjects underwent a two-stage process of psychic recuperation that lasted, in some cases, for months or even years on end. The first of these phases, known as the *acute or disruptive stage*, typically arose within minutes of the assault and acted as a complete and hostile takeover of the body. During this time,

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[45] Petrak, Jenny. "The Psychological Impact of Sexual Assault." *Sexual & Marital Therapy* 12.4 (Nov 1997): 339-345.
[46] Burgess, Ann W. and Linda L. Holmstrom. "Rape Trauma Syndrome." *American Journal of Psychiatry* 131(1974): 981-986.

many of the aforementioned symptoms, including shortness of breath, constant nausea, agoraphobia, hypertension and insomnia, manifested themselves within the victim and lead to a generally debilitating sense of fear and apprehension. Equally prevalent was a sense of bodily disidentification—or rather, self-abnegation—to which the victim herself felt beholden. During this period, physical disgust with one's body or unhappiness over how she reacted at the time ("What could I have done to prevent this?") threaten to topple or overwhelm the victim. This, according to Burgess and Homstrom, was a necessary step toward recovery. And on the heels of such tumult, a climactic process of *reorganization* finally set in during which the given individual managed to work through her despair and achieve a measurable degree of peace or psychic closure. Trauma, it so appeared, had an end.

One of Burgess and Holmstrom's most important observations was that, in each of their female test subjects, a marked vacillation between "controlled" emotional responses and more "demonstrative" vocal outbursts reflected many of the uncertainties facing these women when it came to issues of trust and social reintegration. In a more recent study, social psychologists Koss and Harvey also noted that female victims of rape often displayed such emotions owing to the rote interpellation of normatized gender roles that allow for this behavior to transpire sans reproach; women, after all, at least in accordance to the mantra of modern society, are viewed as inherently more "vulnerable" and weaker than men and therefore deserving of formal space for public healing.[47]

But what of men? And more precisely, of male victims of rape or assault? In the face of mounting statistical data showing the general resistance of male victims to

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[47] Koss, M. and Harvey, M. The Rape Victim: Clinical and Community Interventions. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1991.

testimony (the number of victims seeking outside counseling is equally as pithy), it becomes difficult not to inquire how and if men in this situation are afforded the same affective accommodations as women? Insofar as the ideological structure governing masculinity connotes elements of sexual aggression, bodily wholeness, stamina, strength, and athleticism, the very premise for some of male-male rape seems rooted in a nexus of deconstructive myths that challenge both parties' gendered constitution. Put in layman's terms, many of these myths consider homosexual desire as a powerful motivational force in the attacks. For indeed, in the case of the rapist, not only is the decision to initiate contact seen as a violent acting out or *acknowledgment* of unspeakable desire, but also a *reinforcing* gesture of the rapist's masculinity thanks to his status as a penetrative force. The victim, in the meantime, having concurrently failed to ward off the initial assault, is imagined as having actually "wanted" such relations all along. Who else, after all, but a (closeted) homosexual would so willingly *allow* such behavior to occur?

In contrast to Lee Clark Mitchell's postulation of manhood as built upon the beating, suffering, and eventual rehabilitation of the white male body, the male rape victim is imagined as having been all but emasculated and pushed to a point of impossible return.[48] Outside of the filmic western (and even perhaps the Hollywood combat film), being penetrated by a bullet, chained to a fence, whipped, kicked, dragged by a horse, or even bloodied by a piece of glass is viewed as a direct affront to the process of mastery for which "real" men are ostensibly responsible. As Mitchell writes, the (extra-)digestic scopophilia evinced within such action is deemed integral to the process of "making the man" via narratives of eroticized (and often spectacular)

[48] Mitchell, Lee Clark. Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

"convalescence" (154): "Westerns treat the hero as a rubber doll, something to be wrenched and contorted so that we [the audience] can then watch him magically recover his shape. His convalescence reassures us in the reachievement of a form we have presumed to be static, somehow inorganic" (182).

In the Shadow of No Towers is anything but a narrative of prolonged "reachievement." It begins—and ends—as a narrative rooted in the acute or disruptive phase of recovery and divorced from any sense of mental ease or resolution. "Before 9/11 my traumas were more or less self-inflicted," begins Spiegelman. "But outrunning the toxic cloud that had moments before been the North Tower of the World Trade Center left me reeling on the faultline where World History and Personal History collide—the intersection my parents, Auschwitz survivors, had warned me about when they taught me to always keep my bags packed." Fashioning himself (in a manner not unlike the western) as a man on the "run" from trouble, Spiegelman draws attention to both his male subjectivity's narrative eminence and role of temporal significance.

The 9/11 attacks are imagined as the equivalent of Spiegelman's and subsequent generation's modern holocaust. And it is here, within such striking imagery, that the notion of a violent "colli[sion]" unfolds between a genocidal past seen as unique and irredeemable and an uncanny present to which the author (as witness) is unable to understand or let alone re-present to the reader. Keeping this in mind, if we consider how the "hole" in the project's title page contains the singular leitmotif of the traumatized present (a burning Trade Center tower seconds from collapse), than it becomes entirely possible to view this anal image as a metaphysical passageway or channel through which the past and present collide. In an abrupt reversal therein of Walter Benjamin's

"irresistible" "storm" of progress, *Towers* proposes that in the post-9/11 condition—and really, the condition of the traumatized witness—time does not so much as *move forward* in its gross teleology (or even "stand still" in perpetual arrest), than *move backward*, as if in reverse, in a wholly uncontrollable and haphazard fashion.[49]

Returning to the notion of disidentification, I want to consider as an example the question of Speigelman's crisis in self-representation. Early in the text, Spiegelman and his wife, the celebrated French cartoonist Françoise Mouly, are walking north in their Soho neighborhood when the first thunderous impact pierces the air. Turning around, Spiegelman and Françoise instantly wonder about the fate of Nadja, their teenage daughter. An entering freshman at Stuyvesant High School (located steps from the Trade Center complex), Nadja is imagined as having been consumed—a la her ancestors—in a torrent of smoke and flames. "Mon Dieu!" shrieks Francoise in panic. "Holy shit!" rejoins her awestruck husband. And when repeated attempts fail at reaching their daughter by phone, the couple races south for the rescue. In the initial set of panels, Art and Françoise appear as reasonable facsimiles of their everyday selves: the former with his signature spectacles, disheveled attire, and obligatory half-burned cigarette; the latter, with a red-and-white striped blouse, smoldering Gauloise, and traditional Parisian-style scarf. In subsequent frames, Spiegelman and his wife appear as Rudolph Dirks' famed late-nineteenth-century characters the Katzenjammer Kids, with each wearing a look of wide-eyed panic while a miniaturized trade tower sits blazing atop their head.

Often the dispensers of sadomasochistic humor, the Katzenjammer Kids, who debuted on December 12, 1897 in the pages of William Randolph Hearst's *New York*

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[49] Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." 1940. Rpt in Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings. Vol. IV. Trans. Edmund Jephcott et al. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003: 392.

Journal, were one of the earliest and most influential comic characters of the modern era who rivaled Richard Felton Outcault's *Yellow Kid* for sheer popularity.[50] As comics historian Coulton Waugh has explained, the early success of many such iconic comic strips (of which Outcault's *Buster Brown*, Winsor McCay's *Little Nemo*, and Bud Fischer's *Mutt and Jeff* are also included) had just as much to do with its appeal to working class humor (often crass, often unsophisticated) as it did to overt political lampooning and/or good-natured satire.[51] At a time when publishers in general, and newspapers more precisely, catered to those of a literate, middle-class distinction, each of these strips sought to invoke a form of populist entertainment with which to communicate with the working class masses. Characters such as Hans and Fritz Katzenjammer, Maud the Mule, Little Jimmy (created by James Swinnerton), and Happy Hooligan (F. Opper), were frequently depicted throughout scenes of humiliating punishment that reflected the everyday plight of "simple" individuals (Waugh 37).

That Spiegelman should so readily accesses such history invites a number of intriguing observations. First, that in so positing himself and Françoise as two iconic genre figures, not only has Spiegelman appealed to a historically-informed and visually orientated comic proletariat (many of whom are imagined as politically left-leaning or at odds with the U.S. government), but also to a general, non-comic book-reading public who must consider the aestheticized parallels of the author's current predicament and that of many of his beloved comic counterparts. A secondary point is that insofar as the Katzenjammer Kids' mischievous histrionics almost always beget disastrous returns (playing tricks on a sleeping neighbor results in a conclusive, if inevitable, public

[50] Waugh, Coulton. The Comics. 1947. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1991.
[51] Waugh, Coulton. The Comics. 1947. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1991.

spanking; running through the kitchen while playing "tag" begets a scalding bath of overturned soup), it is possible to imagine how Spiegelman intentionally draws connections between his own bifurcated role as a victimized body or as an instigator of self-imposed trauma.

On the one hand, as a longtime New Yorker, Spiegelman feels compelled to treat the 9/11 attacks as an assault against his own private person: "Y'know how I've called myself a 'rootless cosmopolitan,' equally homeless anywhere on the planet? I was wrong," he remarks to Françoise and Nadja. "I finally understand why some Jews didn't leave Berlin right after Kristallnacht!" (4). New York, in other words, *is* home. But by the same token, the fact that Spiegelman is Jewish-American, a supporter of Israel, and long-time proponent of U.S.-Middle Eastern foreign policy, allows for the alternative supposition that his Jewish-centric politics have ostensibly colored him an *agent provocateur* or menace to Islamic fundamentalism; all of which is to imply that the retaliatory thinking behind 9/11 followed a similar (if clearly non-humorous) logic as surreal and spectacular as comics.

For Spiegelman, the vexed interiority governing his condition fuels the underlying fluidity brought to bear in his self-caricatures at various key moments in the text. Let us consider, for example, the following. On *Towers*' fifth broadside sheet, the Katzenjammer Kids, now referred to as the "Tower Twins," are running through the woods, each still aflame, and in desperate need of liquid abatement. Reclining in the background is the twins' silver-haired relation Uncle Screwloose (a dead ringer for Uncle Sam), who proceeds to pour "de elixir of der gotts" (in reality, an enormous vat of oil) over the heads of his incapacitated nephews. In the ensuing conflagration, both twins are

"slain," and have their flesh peeled off, but remain still very much alive and in distress. Indeed, as is often the wont of comic fantasies housed in the realm of absurdist sentiment, both of the twins, while appearing as miniature child-sized skeletons, soon discover that even more bodily perils lie ahead. In the following frame, Uncle Screwloose is stung by a nearby hornet's nest and vows angrily to exterminate the "heathens." Equipped with a can of pesticide, Uncle Screwloose's excessive fumigation (for which the shell-shocked twins are front-row spectators) proves woefully ineffective and indeed succeeds only in drawing the full ire of the nest. Sequestered within the safety of his airtight home, a relieved Uncle Screwloose gleefully watches as "dose noo york smart aleckers" are left to suffer still another hideous end (5).

Figure 1.2: Spiegelman's fictitious Tower Twins as modeled after Hans and Fritz Katzenjammer. (From *In the Shadow of No Towers* by Art Spiegelman, ©2004 Random House.)

Ignoring for the moment the comic's obvious political allegory, I want to focus instead on the continued crisis of self-representation as evinced within the twins' skeletonization. In the span of eight comic panels, these "dead and cuddly" "kiddies" are

imagined as helpless and triply-victimized: once, as the targets of the 9/11 attacks; twice, as the casualties of a war over oil; and finally, as targets of retaliatory attacks prompted by a government out for blood. As one of these two victimized twins, Spiegelman submits that having already endured instances of multiple assaults, the newly launched War on Terror, despite its mercurial quest for "freedom," will provide little if any formal closure to the thousands of civilians "reliv[ing]" each harrowing moment unavoidably (5). This in itself is hardly unusual to the American New Normal. But what makes such a tense positionality all the more intriguing is the fact that, directly preceding this strip, an image of multiple U.S. citizens with their heads buried deep within the ground (as part of the "new and revolutionary" "Ostrich Party")—including, one should add, a strategically centered individual wearing an enormous target sign on his rear—invites the distinct possibility of *sodomitical assault*, and more precisely, of perceived *ongoing vulnerability* by forces wishing to see America and its people in arrears (5).

Figure 1.3: Spiegelman's proposed "Ostrich Party" and the sodomitical implications behind it. (From *In the Shadow of No Towers* by Art Spiegelman, ©2004 Random House.)

To summarize all these elements thusly, there remains, in the final analysis, an underlying return to the notion of rape, sodomy, and physical victimization as seen throughout Spiegelman's text. More to the point, the symptomatic disorientation common to trauma victims, including, of course, the circular trajectory governing its painful memory (circular in the sense that the individual never seems able to escape its shocking vicissitudes), is summarily contained within the numerous metamorphoses endured by the author from beginning to end. In addition to wearing the mantle of Hans and Fritz Katzenjammer, Spiegelman imagines himself as an ash-colored mouse, a "Hapless Hooligan," or the character of Jiggs from George McManus's *Bringing Up Father* (10, 8). Each of these guises are rooted in a historical—and in the case of *Maus*, self-referential—social context suggestive of a continuous slippage or profound instability within a subject still seeking formal closure. Unlike *Maus*, in which the anthropomorphized identity of the Jewish inmates remains static and divorced from controversy, *Towers* takes place within a vacuum of fear and moral uncertainty that ostensibly hinders all private solace. Like the female victims of rape who felt revulsion at the sight of their newly marked bodies, Spiegelman remains unclear about just how best to situate himself as a male rape survivor. Given the lack of space afforded most men in terms of public arenas of suffering, In *the Shadow of No Towers* offers a bold and largely unprecedented space of healing that simultaneously acknowledges the possibility of communal healing (the text is, after all, a public piece of art) as well as the *im*possibility of manliness.

In contrast to the display of hard-bodied masculinity evinced by that gun-toting "cowboy" President Bush, Spiegelman's affective performance reveals a softer, less vituperate masculinity that can only *react* to the terror all around him. "How can they be so complacent?" he demands in referring to his fellow New Yorkers. "How can they sleep? I know they're on meds of some kind. But don't they know the world is ending?" (9). Such deep-felt anxiety, housed in what clinical psychologist Dori Laub has considered "the ongoing struggle between an imperative need to know . . . and an equally powerful urge to *not know*,"[52] has effectively guided Spiegelman's masculinity into a state of terminal decay: terminal in the sense that his affective performativity has all but marked him a site of unmanly, indeed feminized, comportment.

In a typical narrative of closure, a given male protagonist's implied feminization is restored, almost to a man, throughout a gauntlet of violence and/or unwavering revenge with which the spectator is expected to identify. (Think Sam Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs* or Joel Schumacher's *Falling Down* as primary examples.) *Towers*, by contrast, offers no such catharsis. Instead, what one finds is a desire absent any reprieve or measurable end which denies both the reader and author affective closure in its portrayal of a traumatized present. In short, 9/11 connotes a *totalizing* affair. And for Spiegelman, the idea that such a harrowing event might continue to persist some four years after the attacks, suggests, most distressingly, that on the "happy anniversary" of the terrorist attacks, little if anything has been actually resolved (10).

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[52] Laub, Dori. "September 11, 2001—An Event without a Voice." Trauma at Home: After 9/11. Ed. Judith Greenberg. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003: 204.

2

Almost Famous:
Queer Education and John Updike's *Terrorist*

> *"The only true currency in this bankrupt world is what we share with someone else when we're uncool."*
>
> *"I feel better."*
>
> *"My advice to you. I know you think those guys are your friends. You wanna be a true friend to them? Be honest, and unmerciful."*
>
> - *Exchange between Lester Bangs and William Miller in* Almost Famous *(Cameron Crowe, 2000)*

At a pivotal moment in John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006), Jack Levy, a sixty-three year old guidance counselor at a suburban New Jersey high school, gazes down from atop his second story bedroom at the squalor of his middle-class community. "In the semi-darkness," he observes, "under a polished dome of darkness weakened by the climbing rot of city glow, the foreshortened angles of roof lines, shingles, and sidings recede to infinity," each single-family unit "squeezed closer together" by "rising land costs" and rote "subdivision" (26). For this once tranquil and regimented New Prospect township,

progress has become official social policy. Whereas before, the clean and "simple" facades of semi-detached and colonial-style ranch houses added charm and character to the neighborhood, newly-assembled "dormers, superimposed sundecks, [and] rickety outside staircases," have since given way to a garish aesthetic which the aging protagonist (and lifelong resident) finds distressing or wholly unpalatable (27). It is enough, contends Jack, to drive a hard-working American to arms: "'I was thinking,'" he remarks to his sullen wife Beth, "'this whole neighborhood could [use] a good bomb'" (32).

Though delivered in jest, Jack's acerbic observation raises an intriguing possibility about the identity of the novel's protagonist. Just *who* exactly is the eponymous "terrorist"? Is it Ahmad Ashmawy, the eighteen-year old Muslim who sees America as a land of "devils"? Or might Levy himself, what with his increasing myopia and growing disgust, be construed as a viable candidate? While most would presumably argue for Ahmad as the novel's would-be criminal, I want to suggest that Levy's "sinister" dreams of a flawed and desiccated planet warrant equal if not greater consideration in his role as an *imam*-esque pedagogue—a stance which shall ultimately consider what role if any the modern pedagogue plays in promoting "queer" or misguided education.

Updike's Queer Suburbia

On the surface, Updike's suburban landscape has long reflected the malaise of white heteronormative masculinity. Rising to prominence in 1960 with fictional icon Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom, Updike's vision of America, replete with what Sally Robinson has considered a "consciousness of [white] corporeality," expressed an ongoing

preoccupation with crumbling marriages and aversion to white middle-class anonymity.[53] Hailed as a scion to Cheever or Bard of new suburbia, Updike's significance to American literature—at least in terms of his first few novels—was in his masterful narrativization of white masculinity's sudden disempowerment at the hands of various sexual revolutions. Though often considered a representative study of every male subject in America, Angstrom's decision to flee suburbia and relinquish his wife and son is perhaps more accurately a depiction of the white middle-class "silent majority" who saw its privileged social status now besieged. White masculinity's paradoxical status of being both in control and without is seen as the "hallmark" of Updike's fiction and an integral component of how heteronormativity (or its likeness) is created (Robinson 24). But while it's true, on the whole, that in the presence of women, Updike's men confront myriad fantasies of lack (Rabbit, for one, feels emotionally repressed when in the presence of the dour-faced Janice), the argument could be made that in the company of men (and in particular, their ethnically marked brethren), these ostensibly "straight" individuals also evince flashes of sublimated same-sex desire. For all the critical work, then, depicting Updike's *oeuvre* as the study of hegemonic masculinities, this essay shall propose that at key moments in Updike's fiction—namely the entire Rabbit tetralogy and his recent text *Terrorist* (2006)—the notion of *impossible desire* belies an overlooked "queering" herein inviting critical redress.

To begin with, let's consider how Updike's men evince a level of unspeakable desire. Early in *Rabbit, Run*, the eponymous hero takes a spur-of-the-moment sojourn south of his Brewer, Pennsylvania suburb in an attempt to put the "soot," "stink," and

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[53] Robinson, Sally. Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000: 34.

general "unhealth" of his family and ennui behind him (24).[54] Scurrying away from his "flowerpot city," the harried protagonist realizes that he wants to go "south, down, down the map into orange groves and smoking rivers and barefoot women. It seems simple enough, drive all night through the dawn through the morning through the noon park on a beach take off your shoes and fall asleep by the Gulf of Mexico" (22-23). In contrast to the drab "white"-ness of "weathered" and "sunless" Pennsylvania, Rabbit's tropical fantasy holds a number of sensual dimensions. Not only does the tropical warmth afford the weary patriarch some much-needed psychic reprieve, but also a *darker* and clearly implicit opportunity to explore his enigmatic sexuality.

As star of his high school basketball team, Rabbit was not only a "first-rate" athlete on the court, but the consummate Casanova off it. At one point, while reminiscing during sex about his very first high-school conquest, Rabbit recalls how "he came to [the girl] as a winner and that's the feeling he missed [ever] since," a clear indication of just how pitiful things have become within his "second-rate" marriage to Janice and their woebegone Mt. Judge existence (100). For Matthew Wilson, sex and athletics form crucial pillars in Rabbit's oft-mercurial identity formation.[55] "In the first novel," explains Wilson, "Harry [finds] most of his energy in the rebellion of flight," engaging in a passionate tryst with a prostitute named Ruth in an attempt to feel like a "winner" again (10). Rabbit sees sex as a means of escape. But it is also perhaps the "enactment" of *destructive* desire for which he, as an emotionally repressed male, now acknowledges (Wilson 8; emphasis mine). Try as he might, Rabbit cannot elude the yoke of domestic

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[54] This essay draws its page citations from the two volume collected works of Updike's tetralogy. See: Updike, John. Rabbit Novels Vol. 1. New York: Ballantine Books, 2003.

[55] Wilson, Matthew. "The Rabbit Tetralogy: From Solitude to Society to Solitude Again." *Modern Fiction Studies* 37.1 (Spring 1991): 5-24.

servitude. Yet he *does* try. He *does* fantasize. And in so doing, may in fact subscribe to what Lee Edelman considers the innate death drive of queer, antisocial subjectivity.[56]

In dreaming of the South, Rabbit's vision of a "wilder," less regimented culture—note how the absence of commas in the aforementioned fantasy implies a slippage or loosening of proper grammatical structure—reads, on the one hand, like that of a turn-of-the-century frontier narrative (in which the rugged and tempestuous terrain functions as a popular parable for the reification of hegemonic masculinity); and, on the other, a subversive wish or "double life" (to invoke George Chauncey's terminology) of ongoing queer possibility.[57] One is reminded here of Christopher Craft's analysis of "Bunburying"—Algernon Moncrieff's favorite activity in *The Importance of Being Importance*—in which the eligible young bachelor's fantasy of traveling "down into the country" to visit "an invaluable permanent invalid called Bunbury" reads as a demarcated opportunity for the unspeakable (i.e. homosexual) desire to "bury" one's body in a "bun."[58] Algernon utilizes this fantasy in order to recuse himself from unwanted social engagements: a trip to the Savoy; dinner with Aunt Augusta. But he also believes in the general utility of this fantasy for each other male in London: "Nothing will induce me to part with Bunbury, and if you ever get married, which seems to me extremely problematic, you will be very glad to know Bunbury. A man who marries without

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[56] In No Future, Edelman proposes the cultural representation of queerness is always already consigned as antithetical to social politics. Queerness, he contends, is to be thought of as a negative space that, while never "defin[ing]" an identity, always succeeds in "disturb[ing]" one.

[57] In *Gay New York*, Chauncey explains that the term "double life" was early twentieth century lingo for male homosexual behavior. As a contrast to upstanding, "normative" lifestyle, same-sex desire was the shadowy "double" of sexual hijinks. See *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, New York: Basic Books, 1994: 6-7, 273-80.

[58] Craft, Christopher. Another Kind of Love: Male Homosexual Desire in English Discourse, 1850-1920. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994: 106-139.

knowing Bunbury has a very tedious time of it" (Wilde 363).[59] What is clear here is that Bunburying acts as an intrinsically *masculine* apparatus whose grounding in the realm of homosocial community doubles as a codified language amongst married men desperately "running" for their lives.

In *Rabbit, Run*, Harry is denied any convenient escape, after failing to actually satiate his wanderlust (West Virginia is as far as he goes). But in *Rabbit is Rich*, the now-middle aged protagonist succeeds in fleeing his suburban confines, by traveling—along with Janice and two other couples—south for a Caribbean vacation. As Sally Robinson writes, within Rabbit's largely romanticized Third World vision, "civilization has been left behind." Rabbit, she insists, has entered a sphere of subversive splendor: on sun-soaked mornings, each of the vacationers sip cocktails over golf and partake in elaborate luncheons; at night, behind the walls of their bedroom, each has free "license to break their own laws" (Robinson 46). With this in mind, it seems hardly surprising that during their trip each couple agrees to a series of wife-swaps during which Rabbit ends up "fucking [his neighbor] Thelma up the ass," and feeling "freer, more in love with . . . the world" (*Rich* 403).

Cognizant of how such unusual activity connotes a modicum of sexual ambiguity, Robinson submits that in so vigorously sodomizing Thelma, the once-virile suburban patriarch has succeeded in reestablishing his hitherto morose masculinity via an act of spectacular violence. Judie Newman, in the meantime, reads this and the rest of Rabbit's avowed sexual behavior as part of an ongoing preoccupation with anal activity or scenes

[59] Wilde, Oscar. "The Importance of Being Earnest." The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde. London: Harper Collins, 2003.

of scatological importance.[60] "Rarely in a novel," writes Newman, "with the possible exception of *Tender is the Night* or *Portnoy's Complaint* have so many major events taken place in the bathroom" (62). Borrowing from Freud, Newman argues that "the imagery of waste [including the fetishistic occurrence of Rabbit's forays to the bathroom] . . . forms a vital part of Updike's analysis of the power of money in the novel" and depiction of his protagonist as anally-retentive (62). Marshall Boswell takes Newman's logic even further, noting how Rabbit's constant evocation of the anal zone (at one point, Rabbit observes his friend Ronnie Harrison's bald head as "blank and pink and curved, like an ass") borders precipitously upon the realm of queer sublime.[61]

Equally pronounced is the element of death throughout Rabbit's fantasies. Towards the end of *Rabbit is Rich*, Harry and Janice visit their local savings bank in order to load up their safe deposit box. While sequestered in the bank's lower vault, Harry considers making love to Janis on the spot: "He takes off his black overcoat and drops it on top [of Janice's]. Sweat of exertion has made [Janice's] hair springier; her bangs have curled back to reveal that high glossy forehead that is so much her, now and twenty years ago, that he kisses it, tasting salt. He wonders if people have ever screwed in these cubicles and imagines that a vault would be a nice place, one of those primped-up young tellers and a lecherous old mortgage officer, put the time-lock on to dawn and ball away" (*Rich* 337). Realizing the practical futility of this fantasy, Angstrom is quickly struck by the morbid imagery of the vault's interior, as his "long [safe deposit] box" is inserted back into the "empty rectangle" of the wall like a coffin put to rest in its crypt (338). That such ritualized action should also imply sexual behavior allows Boswell to

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[60] Newman, Judie. John Updike. Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan Education, 1988.
[61] Boswell, Marshall. John Updike's Rabbit Tetralogy: Mastered Irony in Motion. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001: 168-84.

read the wall's vaginal space as a *rectal image* which doubles, a la Bersani, as a grave. Indeed, it is this particular imagistic refraction in the text—repeated in the "dark" and "silent" "tunnel" through which Rabbit travels on his daily jog—that functions as a "tunnel of death" [62] or spectral oblivion always already haunting the protagonist (*Rich* 126).

As we shall see, such morbid signification also plays a part in the structure of suburbia as a whole. For now, however, I want to return to the question of Rabbit's sexuality and his treatment of Thelma Harrison. To reiterate an earlier argument, Sally Robinson reads Rabbit's actions as a turn toward a more hegemonic form of masculinity built upon aggressive male behavior, female placidity, and eroticized sexual violence. A plausible explanation (if perhaps mildly facile), Robinson's stance too easily discounts the possibility that Rabbit, in being finally "free" of his suburban confines, has indirectly acted upon a desire to touch or fuck other men. Rather than depict the married protagonist as queer or a closet homosexual, Robinson finds space to re-center the aging patriarch back within a realm of restrictive hermeneutics. Here, I want to significantly depart from Robinson's rubric and call for a queer recalibration of Rabbit's character as subversive or consciously transgressive. Throughout all four Rabbit novels, Angstrom's "weird" fascination with many of his black companions—the tall, young gas station attendant in *Rabbit, Run* whom Harry has a "weird impulse" to hug; Tiger, the talented point guard in *Rabbit at Rest* whose body is both "cruel" and "graceful" and blessed with "wonderful . . . teeth"; or even Skeeter, *Rabbit Redux*'s mentally unstable black revolutionary, whom our domesticated hero, now separated from Janice, invites to move in as his friend and

[62] Boswell, Marshall. John Updike's Rabbit Tetralogy: Mastered Irony in Motion. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001: 168.

companion—promotes my own personal desire to preserve Rabbit's fluidity and status as liminal subject.[63] Skeeter (a.k.a. Hubert Johnson) is perhaps the most vivid instance of Rabbit's underlying homosexual tendencies. Consider the following:

> Physically, Skeeter fascinates Rabbit. The lustrous pallor of the tongue and palms and the soles of the feet, left out of the sun. Or a different kind of skin? White palms never tan either. The peculiar glinting luster of his skin. The something so very finely turned and finished in the face, reflecting light at a dozen polished points: in comparison white faces are blobs: putty still drying. The curious greased grace of his gestures, rapid and watchful as a lizard's motions, free of mammalian fat. Skeeter in his house feels like a finely made electric toy; Harry wants to touch him but is afraid he will get a shock. (*Redux* 218)[64]

Heavily suffused with fetishistic and erotic undertones, this description of the self-proclaimed "messiah" calls to mind both a classic Richard Avedon art-piece ("Marian Anderson," "Richard Casby, Born a Slave") or homoeroticized Christian spectacle (Andrea Mantegna's "The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian"), as both Skeeter's "lustrous pallor" and "greased grace" add an exotic, indeed reptilian dimension to the mantle of primitive blackness. Unlike Harry, Skeeter has little trouble feeling liberated or sexually desired. His body is at once rapturous in its "peculiar" characteristics, and transgressive, or intensely "shock[ing]," thanks to his decision to live in suburbia. Most

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[63] Rabbit, Run 30; Rabbit at Rest, 459-460.
[64] All citations from *Rabbit Redux* are extracted from: Updike, John. Rabbit Novels Vol. 1. New York: Ballantine Books, 2003.

important, at one point in *Rabbit, Redux*, Skeeter, Harry, and a teenage runaway named Jill decide to reenact a scene from Frederick Douglass's autobiographical *Life and Times* during which a young female slave (Jill) is raped by her owner (Skeeter) while the immobilized husband looks on (Harry).

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theory of erotic triangulation is applicable here, as Jill's prostrate form—described as silent and "full of holes"—becomes the vessel or conduit through which male homoerotic affection is expressed vis-à-vis an instance of *ménage à trios* (*Redux* 259). Equally significant is the fact that Rabbit, Skeeter, and Jill constitute an inherently queer or monstrous vision of the future: namely, a same-sex and ostensibly generative familial unit in the midst of heteronormative society. Within its narrow parameters, Updike's suburbia, like that of Sinclair Lewis, Sloan Wilson, Sherwood Anderson, or John Cheever mandates that male sexual energy be summarily displaced onto expectations of familial governance. Within this schema, the only "good" sex allowed is that performed with the intent of procreative possibility; anyone considered oppositional to such thinking is summarily targeted for extraction. This being said, it seems hardly surprising that in an act eerily anticipatory of Freddie Kruger's demise at the hands of Elm Street, Rabbit's horrified neighbors conspire to burn down his house as a result of the uncouth company he keeps.

In so describing what many might consider the self-regulatory ability of suburban settings, Updike's signature literary backdrop assumes, in Robert Beuka words, a "dynamic, often defining element" to the narrative thread as a whole.[65] Placed in direct contrast to the sin-riddled and diversified city, the American suburb exists as a ring-like

[65] Beuka, Robert A. SuburbiaNation: Reading Suburban Landscape in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004: 2.

structure successfully surrounding, but never quite touching, such "poison[ous]" pillars of urbanity (*Run* 25). More important, because such planned communities maintain the sheen of stately propriety, the social hierarchy in place accesses a form of corporatized identity in which the survival of the hive—or in this case street—is paramount and well worth dying for. (*The Stepford Wives'* Joanna Eberhart could hardly disagree.[66])

Truth be told, Updike's suburbia is best imagined as a modern day middle-class panopticon insofar as its fundamental mechanism "arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately" the culture and community at large (Foucault 200). Suburbia, like prison, is built upon the premise of surveillance. Its "inmates," in accordance with their incarcerated peers, are allotted a series of separate cells ("little boxes" really) that not only enforce the first (and only) of the three principles of the dungeon—"to enclose" at all cost—but also delimit the very apparatus of panoptic vision to which each inmate is arbitrarily assigned. Within the context of prison, Foucault proposes two divergent lines of sight: *axial visibility*, applicable primarily to the inmates themselves and defined as the ability to look straight ahead at the guard tower; and *lateral visibility*—the ability to see side to side—which only the prison supervisor and his attendants enjoy.

For Foucault, the binarization of visibility is an essential tool in the maintenance of systems of power. Power, he insists, is manifested within an "enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded," and agency proves all the more ephemeral (197). This in turn, when applied to enforced incarceration, ushers a given individual into a "ritual of exclusion," during which he or

[66] Levin, Ira. The Stepford Wives. New York: Random House, 1972.

she is not only divorced from all aspects of autonomous authority, but also his similarly disenfranchised peers as well. Confinement, in short, is a form of proactive discipline. And thus if a prison may be said to control all opportunities for collegial discourse, so too might suburban dwellings (described by Richard Yates as "a toyland of white and pastel houses whose bright, uncurtained windows win[k] blandly through a dappling of green and yellow leaves") create a similarly daunting scenario in which access to power (i.e. independent expression) is made both "visible" and "unverifiable" (Foucault 201). For the average prison inmate, what is always already before him is the "tall outline" of the central viewing tower—imposing, resolute, and uncompromising—which at once dominates the immediate landscape and suggests a visual hierarchization of order, accordance, and control. By the same token, what is also already true is the fact that the entire inmate community never actually knows when they are (*or are not*) being observed from inside the tower, a state which Foucault believes fosters apprehension amongst a paranoid inmate collective (201).

While there remains a clear distinction between the inmates and prison authorities, the suburban landscape provides a far more complicated elision in its pretensions of axial and lateral polyvalence. What the suburbs lack in terms of a central, all-seeing tower is more than made up for within its generative façade of repetitive social surfaces forcing each resident to conform. On the one hand, then (and if the near-overwhelming array of filmic narratives are any indication), suburbia's inhabitants might best be described as the inmates of the peripheric ring who remain "totally seen, without ever seeing" the lives of their next door neighbors (Foucault 202). On the other hand, the modern suburbanite could also be imagined as residing *within* the all-seeing tower itself,

in effect learning *how* to see "everything" around him (the houses, yards, street, and distant city) without *being* seen or branded a voyeur.

(Interestingly enough, D.J. Caruso's *Disturbia*, in offering an excellent update of Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, interrogates this very notion within a homoerotic narrative of male-male voyeurism set in Eastern New York suburbia. Much like its iconic predecessor, *Disturbia* is the tale of a housebound teen who gradually suspects that his next door neighbor is a wanted serial murderer. Kale, played by a manic Shia LeBeouf, sets about attempting to prove his suspicions by spying on his neighbor (David Turner) with a digital camera and two initially skeptical neighborhood friends. In *Rear Window*, both the direction of the protagonist's gaze and cinematic apparatus play a significant role in framing the narrative tension as an erotically-charged exchange between men. In *Disturbia*, however, the film's suburbanized backdrop seeks to amplify such tension by committing the cardinal sin of looking *through* the very barrier (i.e. the property line hedge and clapboard exteriors) by which privacy and separation is enforced. In a sense, Kale's once innocent act of voyeurism proves doubly transgressive as both the invasion of his neighbor's privacy and homoerotic queering of the suburban paradigm—in suburbia, the politics of reproductive futurism are such that men do not examine one another as voyeurs—become points to a dual-pronged spectatorial anxiety.)

My point here is this: that suburbia, in offering both fantasies of containment and marginal authority, has inadvertently queered the apparatus of desire to the point of collapse, and brought straight, white, middle-class masculinity to a dangerous, even violent, social threshold. John Updike, as both a product of suburbia and privileged Manhattan refugee, likely surmised that within such an artificial and often emasculating

realm, the suburban lifestyle had become fiercely pedagogical, if not staid and dictatorial in scope. The men of Updike's *oeuvre*, from Rabbit to Henry Bech, George and Peter Caldwell, Alfred Clayton, Jerry Conant, Piet Hanemas, Richard Maple, Richard Mathias, and now the increasingly disaffected Jack Levy, are purveyors of an intrinsically antisocial ideology fashioned around personal preservation. Though I risk accusations of too easily conflating queerness with destructive impulses, I want to suggest that Updike's vision of middle America is perhaps more accurately imagined as a brand of "bad" education to which married white subjects so adhere.

As such, in an era when the government's "pro-family policy" (from Jimmy Carter's "Nine Point Plan for the Family" to George W. Bush's "No Child Left Behind Act") all but rendered the suburbs a sanctified zone for child rearing, Updike's authorial conceits—coming from a father of four—appear to offer an ominous rejoinder. "If men do not keep on speaking terms with children, they cease to be men, and become merely machines for eating and for earning money," explained Updike early on.[67] This, in conjunction with his protagonists' ongoing struggles for individual mastery, suggests that the architecture of Updike's suburbia is ultimately a grave or rectum that simultaneously constricts (contains) its straight white occupants, while expelling any unwanted matter (black, brown, yellow, etc.). Like the initial wave of terror first evinced early on in the AIDS epidemic, a married male subject's abrupt disavowal of heteronormative inclinations (reproductive futurism, an embrace of consumerist ideology) must always be erased (destroyed, quarantined, cured) in order for suburbia's social conceits to persist. In short, individuation, like gay male sexual orientation, is seen as the abyss or catacomb wherein a shattered masculinity is buried.

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[67] See the "Preface" to Updike's Assorted Prose. Robbinsdale, MN: Fawcett Books, 1965.

In the final analysis, it seems hardly surprising that Rabbit's tragic demise (from a heart attack incurred while competing against the point guard Tiger occurs amidst the stillness of the patriarch's domesticated confines and onset of middle-aged stagnation. Coming full circle, so to speak, with the casual game of pick-up found in *Rabbit, Run*'s opening lines, both the protagonist's unexpected swoon and machinic existence—at the end of *Rabbit at Rest*, "[Janice] sees Harry lying in one of [the hospital beds] as white as his sheets, with all these tubes and wires going in and out of him" (464)—would appear to suggest a multi-tiered male ontological crisis surrounded by and impinged upon by death. Like the "pale"-faced factory workers at the beginning of *Rabbit Redux* who emerge from their darkened workshops as "ghosts," Rabbit's cyborgic recalibration represents the ultimate queering of white masculinity in terms of both bodily integrity and health (4). Simply put, Rabbit's gendered annihilation has at last come tragically to pass.

Native Son

Sixteen years removed from sending Angstrom to an early grave, Updike returned to his suburban palimpsest with the 2006 release of *Terrorist*. Its reviews were decidedly tepid. In *The New York Times*, Michiko Kakutani described the book as "shopworn" and banal, complaining that while the novel's focus offered "a thoroughly topical subject" upon which Updike could further expand *Terrorist* was ultimately a "maladroit" text

lacking both the author's signature depth and grace.[68] Jonathan Raban in *The New York Review of Books* was only slightly more receptive:

> *Terrorist* does so many things well—is rich in scenes, or at least sights, of arresting brilliance, and sucks the reader into a gripping and suspenseful story—that it may seem churlish to harp on the one thing it does badly, which is to imaginatively comprehend the roots and character of Islamist jihad against the West. Because Updike shrinks from giving any real credence to the ideology that drives his plot (in both senses of that word), the book becomes a temporarily enthralling, but ultimately empty, shaggy dog story. If only the novelist had spent more time dreaming himself into the paranoid and angry world of Qutb and his followers, and given Ahmad Mulloy sufficient intellectual and emotional wherewithal to justify his adherence to the crooked path of righteous violence, *Terrorist* might have stood among Updike's best work. As it is, it conducts an energetic, entertaining, but disappointingly unconsummated flirtation with its important subject.[69]

Terrorist is by no means an exceptional novel or one of Updike's more endearing contributions to literature. What it is, however, is an important coda to his career-long fascination with suburbia inasmuch as the two main characters, each with multiple grievences, attempt to *destroy* the landscape's grasp altogether. As evinced within this

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[68] Kakutani, Michiko. "John Updike's 'Terrorist' Imagines a Homegrown Threat to Homeland Security." *The New York Times*, 6 June 2006.
[69] Raban, Jonathan. "The Good Soldier." *The New York Review of Books* 53.12 (July 13, 2006): 8-11.

chapter's opening lines, Levy's considerable unrest over the state of his native land is subsequently internalized to a point where he himself feels "squeezed" or crushed by society. Like so many other of his moribund predecessors, Jack is aware of all the "personal misery" he faces in the twilight of his professional career (20). Rather than taking pride in his lengthy achievements: a top-tier scholar at CCNY; a short but distinguished career in the U.S. military; completion of a Rutgers master's degree; marriage to a capable woman; father of an aspiring dentist; a thirty-year stint as a high-school history teacher; and the last six sending students off to college, the struggling sexagenarian believes he has "missed the right path" toward fulfillment, or at the very least, a measurable peace (21).

Sequestered behind the sanctity of New Jersey's tomb-like, generative veneer, Jack equates his life to equivalent of a "coffin," at once constricted, insurmountable, and surrounded on all sides by darkness (22). Jack's heteronormative development, invested in terms of matrixical masculinity, seems inundated by fears of growing anonymity funneled throughout fantasies of abjection: "[S]ustained in wakefulness by a nagging bladder, [Jack] lies exposed, as to a sickening blast of radioactivity, to an awareness of his life as "a needless blot—a botch, a prolonged blunder—imposed upon the otherwise immaculate surface" of reality (22). In so imaging himself as physically marred, Jack's internalized crisis acts as synecdoche for post-9/11 male identity, suggesting, as has been this project's overall conceit, a nationwide fantasy of despair and unmanning played out across the cultural imaginary. At the height (or depth?) of his gendered malaise, Jack submits that his body's "sole remaining task" is "to ready itself for death"; to create in other words "a little space, a little breathing room" on the face of the "overburdened

planet" (27, 20). While on the surface, such nihilistic logic arrives as a merciful (if blasphemous) conclusion, my thinking here is that the incipient antisociality of Jack's behavior impinges upon what Walter Laqueur would consider the fundamental crux of the modern-day terrorist: namely, the "illegitimate use of force" to achieve a counter-normative "political objective."[70]

Couched in such terms, Jack's disruptive negativity reinforces Lee Edelman's notion of the queer male subject's adherence to an unacknowledged death drive. "Queerness," he writes, "can never define an identity; it can only disturb one"; which is to say that queerness *tout court* exists as the negative "other" of a generative politic committed to enforcing the cherished Child's social growth (17, 11). Edelman views queerness as less a geometric construct than an amorphous presence (fluid shadow) evinced by its oppositional logic. Such willful thinking, in effect positing the queer as combative or malicious, owes a significant debt to Leo Bersani and Judith Butler, who each suggested that the coalescing forces of queer visibility (gay pride, the ongoing fight for gay marriage) potentially "de-gay" the very essence of queer identity as part of a process of social integration (*Homos* 32). Queers, Bersani cautioned, should not be so quick to emulate their married peers, especially when considering how the liberation movement's progenitors saw both heteronormativity and municipal governance as cruel and highly despicable. Taking to heart Bersani's cry for Queers to resist "be[ing] recognized" as "good," I want to synthesize both his and Edelman's polemical cant and call for a return to what Andrea Fontenot describes as a "discourse of ethics" by reading

[70] Laqueur, Walter. The Age of Terrorism. New York: Little Brown & Company, 1987.

both queer desire and queer sexuality as terroristic or *purposely* destructive (Bersani 32).[71]

Where I see this as relevant to Jack is in how his spiteful desire to destroy suburbia connotes not only a rupture challenging reproductive politics as such, but also a powerful return to queer sexuality's once radical roots, including its rejection of heterotopic (i.e. "straight") white suburbia. Reproductive futurism posits male subjectivity as an eminently fecund or "positive" force. It demands that the adult male subject be fruitful and multiply and remain attentive to his home and loved ones. Even the slightest deviation, whether real or imagined, is considered an affront to the subject's masculinity and grounds for its ultimate inscription as "queer" behavior, either morally or politically unfit. Jack, at first glance, appears the exception to the rule. For indeed, as a husband, father, and suburban resident, his social identification clearly suggests all the trappings of hegemonic normativity. And yet despite such ostensive posturing, Jack's avowed desire to both obliterate his neighborhood and die in the process is perhaps more reasonably housed within a suicide bomber than a proud suburban dad near retirement; a fact which Updike himself also acknowledges in lending his protagonist stealth "almost criminal" (26).

Equally as compelling as Jack's desire to escape his suburban confines is how his role as a wizened counselor mirrors that of the mysterious Shaikh Rashid, Ahmad Ashmawy's spiritual imam, and his lessons of Islamic "true faith" (105). In the text, just as the aging prophet urges his students toward acts of *jihad*, so the cynical Levy guides his "needy, surly, misguided" pupils toward a similar state of oblivion (40). Both men, it

[71] Fontenot, Andrea. "Review of *No Future*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 52.1 (2006): 252-256.

appears, are heavily invested in the *futures* of American youth—the one to recruit members for his "righteous" organization and the other to preach the merits of college (231). Rashid, in his literal relegation to the margins (he resides "on a street of stores, above a beauty shop and a place where they give you cash"), seems an obvious misanthropic pedagogue as his message of servitude and selflessness, sacrifice and hope, connotes promises of "sublime" possibility: "'The enemy has only the mirage of selfishness, of many small selves and interests, to fight for: our side has a single sublime selflessness. We submit to God and become one with Him, and with one another'" (38, 234-235). For Updike, the homoerotic implication behind Rashid's rhetoric (at various points, he describes the Muslim male supplicant's "union" with Mohammed in erotic, almost ritualized tones) holds the additional dimension of directly challenging Rashid's ostensive masculinity. Throughout the narrative, Rashid is described as having "soft white hand[s]," a "slight and small" body, and "tiny" black shoes like a "child's." By contrast, the Jersey-born Tylenol Jones, who bullies Ahmad and smells of hamburgers and french fries, wields "iron-strong" muscles and a brash demeanor which Ashmawy considers wholly repugnant (138, 104, 15). Rashid is clearly a feminized body; and as such, when considered alongside his disease-marred complexion, it is clear that Updike envisions the "slight and slim" pedagogue in terms of deeply felt bodily abjection (145).

A similar point could also be made for Jack's role as an interpolating subject. Indeed, as a credentialed academic whose life now consists of "pushing pencils . . . tapping computer keys now . . . and being pleasant and helpful to people," Jack is responsible for transforming his wayward, often "misguided" pupils into an army of mindless consumers—what horror icon George A. Romero has envisioned as a phalanx

of zombified minions (109). Not only is Jack a cog in one of the most formidable of American enterprises—the machine of higher education, but also a bored and largely dyspeptic male pedagogue who presents an alternative vision of the terrorist: rather than encouraging his teenage clients to construct their own identities, Jack insists (or more likely, is mandated from above) to ensure that each individual embrace their "potential" as scholars and employees (110, 90).

Such behavior, in turn, raises compelling questions about the role of the contemporary pedagogue. Indeed in today's often cantankerous climate where both Jews and academics remain venerable if unerring cultural institutions (a fact to be discussed momentarily), Updike's novel appears to offer a provocative—and largely accurate—portrayal of the "dark side" of American ideology. Why is it, submits Updike, that the academic community remains beyond reproach when it comes to terrorism? Why is it that the "Eden[ic]" purview of public education insists that all of its citizens "[c]ontribute to America" and form "peaceful armies of democratic enterprise"? (110). While it's true that Horace Mann's seminal vision of education remains a truism to U.S. culture, it is also possible that such unwavering commitment to "practical" education gives way to "rote" or disingenuous pedagogical behavior (110).

The fact that Jack is Jewish, well-educated, and deeply ensconced within middle-class America is an obvious if perhaps stereotypical example of how the post-World War II intellectual landscape became "Jewisized" (to invoke the lexicon of various white supremacists) both in and around the academy. As conservative theorist Arthur Hertzberg has explained, national universities in the wake of the Holocaust were "the first established American institutional arena in which Jews entered and even joined the elite"

(311).[72] This sudden cultural influx, inaugurated by the 1968 appointment of Edward H. Levi as president of the University of Chicago, was especially monumental considering how adamant many of the nation's premier universities had been at maintaining their historic Anglo-Saxon ideologies.[73] Harvard University, for one, while speaking on behalf of its Ivy League colleagues, insisted, at the turn of the century, that Jewish intellectuals were not welcome within its confines because of their "peculiar practices" and "radical" theological beliefs. A. Lawrence Lowell, Harvard's president at the time, even went so far as to propose the complete *eradication* of the school's "Jew problem" by establishing a quota for all incoming Hebrew applicants. It was, as legal historian Alan M. Dershowitz has explained, but the latest in a series of anti-Semitic policies revolving around the Jewish subject's disreputable or "extreme" social character (66-67).[74]

As part of his ongoing interest in Jewish identity and otherness, Sander Gilman explains that the anti-Semitic sentiment vilifying Jews leading up to and during World War II, gradually gave way to sympathetic thoughts softening once-intractable academia in an age of "biological racism" (6).[75] Jewish intelligence, explains Gilman, was often received with suspicion and scorn by Anglo subjects. For many of these individuals, intelligence in Jews, as opposed to whites, was equated with manipulative, deceitful, untrustworthy behavior stemming from self-serving praxis. In the realm of academia, concurs Edward S. Shapiro, Jewish representation among members of the faculty and administration was equally just as scarce. According to Shapiro, it would not be until

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[72] Hertzberg, Arthur. The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter, A History. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989.
[73] Shapiro, Edward S. "The Friendly University: Jews in Academia since World War II." *Judaism* 46.3 (Summer 1997): 365-375.
[74] Dershowitz, Alan M. Chutzpah. Boston: Little, Brown, 1991.
[75] Gilman, Sander L. Smart Jews: The Construction of the Image of Jewish Superior Intelligence. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996.

Edward Levi's appointment at Chicago that institutional anti-Semitism—whether intentional or not—was imagined as having formally run its course. Indeed, fast on the heels of their Midwestern peers, two other intellectual bastions—the California Institute of Technology and Massachusetts Institute of Technology—elected to rebuke tradition and place a Jewish representative at the helm. Soon thereafter, various other institutions, including Rutgers (Edward J. Bloustein, 1971), University of California-Berkeley (David. S. Saxon, 1975), Michigan (Harold Tafler Shapiro, 1980), Columbia (Michael Ira Sovern, 1980) and Indiana (Thomas Ehrlich, 1987) quickly followed suit (Shapiro 365). Outside of Columbia (which had New York City's vibrant Jewish community to contend with), the rest of the Ivy League remained adamantly opposed to naming a non-Christian representative as its leader. Ironically enough, such avowed resistance had little impact on the number of Jewish applications and admissions to the Ivy League during the war. Indeed, shortly after the Japanese surrender on September 2, 1945, Jewish enrollment across the Ivies was especially pronounced, culminating, by the early 1970s, in nearly twenty-five percent of all undergraduate admissions—by far, the most widely represented minority on campus. As Shapiro explains, campus-based Jewish recognition also improved dramatically: "With a larger percentage of Jewish students, the Ivy League institutions became more sensitive to Jewish concerns, such as providing kosher food, exempting Jews from Saturday examinations and classes, and not scheduling university events on Jewish holidays" (370).

Unlike previous generations of attendees, where public displays of Jewry were kept at an absolute minimum out of deference to personal safety, postwar Jewish culture assumed a far more vigorous campus presence both within and outside the classroom.

Jewish faculty members, for one, were notably vocal in their complaints of religious bias and/or ethnic intolerance within the administrative ranks. Elsewhere on campus, Hebrew student groups helped reverse years of anti-Semitic practice by calling for the removal of biased language from university charters and increased recognition of ethnic difference. As Shapiro writes, after years of bureaucratic inactivity, such was a significant concession for sure (371). If, before the war, Jewish intellectuals found little or no formal employment at schools, the G.I. Bill of Rights and attendant financial boom yielded many joyous (perhaps miraculous) appointments. Over the following two decades, Jewish representatives gained admittance into hitherto Francophone or Anglican-dominated departments—history, psychology, English, philosophy; while various others, including Columbia's Uriel Weinreich, were recruited for more specialized fields of Jewish history, theology, and culture.

As novelist and historian James Yaffe has explained, the academy became a largely secular realm at a time when accusations of racial intolerance and anti-Semitism were treated by many as cultural anathema.[76] Gone were the days when popular chants took to characterizing Jews as descendents or prophets of Satan: "Oh, Harvard's run by millions; and Yale is run by booze. Cornell is run by farmers' sons; Columbia's run by Jews. So give a cheer for Baxter Street; another one for Pell. And when the little sheenies die; their souls will go to hell" (Steinberg 233).[77] Instead, for a once invisible minority population, the postwar years presented a measurable level of solace—or vindication—culminating in the 1991 and 1993 appointments of Neil L. Rudenstine and Richard C.

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[76] Yaffe, James. The American Jews. New York: Random House, 1968.

[77] In The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in America (New York: Antheneum, 1981), Stephen Steinberg cites this as a popular chant heard around eastern college campuses of the 1910s. According to Steinberg, anti-Semitic displays were "common" to campus life, reflecting a ubiquitous belief of Jews as foreign entities potentially disruptive (and destructive) to society (233).

Levin to the presidencies of Harvard and Yale respectively. For the first time ever, the conflation of Jewish intellectualism with "elite" education proved an ethico-political reality.

As a Harvard alumnus and practicing Lutheran, Updike's exposure to Jewish motility soon became informative to his own extensive intellectual development. Accused on numerous occasions (most recently by an editorial in *The New York Observer* on November 26, 2003) of being an erudite anti-Semite, Updike's detractors insisted that his literary criticism and suburban narratives were too easily dismissive of the modern-day Jew. Outside of Henry Bech, who, like Jack, is a moribund and apathetic Jew, Updike's protagonists are often Christian in upbringing, and lacking obstreperous theological conceits. Bech in particular has come under fire for being, in Cynthia Ozick's words, a flat character or "false" Jew who serves as little more than an "Appropriate Reference Machine" for his creator's anti-Semitic postulations (115). Ozick's conceit is that Bech comes across as Updike's would-be Rothian surrogate; although unlike, say, the incomparable Alex Portnoy, Bech is far less convincing as an angst-ridden pariah who struggles with the burden of his race's dark ontogeny.[78] Sharing Ozick's view, Sanford Pinsker suggests that Updike may have sought "safe distance" from his writing in order to critique the mid-century adulation of Jewish American writers ("critical attention, literary prizes, public recognition") that arose at the expense of an established WASP male intellectualism (98). "My hunch," writes Pinsker, "is that Henry Bech provided Updike with a vehicle for talking about the current literary scene from the safe

[78]Ozick, Cynthia. "Bech, Passing." Art & Ardor. New York: Knopf, 1983.

distance that a persona provides.[79] In Bech's skin, as it were, Updike could take some well-deserved swings at literary politics—the way it makes, or breaks, reputations, arranges junkets, and hands out its prizes" (99). Pinsker sees in Bech "Updike's chance to tongue a vaguely aching tooth," and better still, "a springboard to extended fantasy, not unlike the one that sent Rabbit Angstrom scampering through the last decades of our darkening century" (99).

Imbuing Updike with authorial rage is an intriguing strategy for sure. More important, what Pinsker's supposition also provides is a blueprint by which one can conflate Jack's numerous misgivings with that of Updike's own escalating unease over his role as a white writing subject. In *Terrorist*, Jack's Jewishness is seen as both a point of antagonism and mark of historical trauma. Not only does he reject much if not all of his parents' advances (at one point, he abandons the violin out of spite), but also courts a German-American (Beth), forgoes a traditional Jewish wedding (he is wed on the second floor of City Hall), and later resists, however unsuccessfully, the ritual circumcision of his only son Mark. Within such behavior, it stands to reason that the belligerent patriarch is somehow interested in *terrorizing* or at the very least *betraying* all major tenets of his own religion. "He was a Jew," recounts the narrator, "But not a proud Jew, wrapped in the ancient covenant . . . [T]he Jewish God had [n]ever been big on promises—a shattered glass at your wedding, a quick burial in a shroud when you die, no saints, no afterlife, just a lifetime of drudging loyalty to the tyrant who asked Abraham to make a burnt offering of his only son. Poor Isaac, the trusting schmuck . . ." (23-24). Jack takes great pride in being one of Judaism's "stiff-necked naysayers," which is to say that what

[79] Pinsker, Sanford. "Updike, ethnicity, and Jewish-American drag." The Cambridge Companion to John Updike. Ed. Stacey Olster. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006: 91-106.

he rejects most about his ethnic upbringing is its blood-stained history of submission, sacrifice, abstention, and loyalty to which he and his brothers ascribe (24).

With its ongoing emphasis on self-abnegation and sacrifice, Judaism may be said to parallel the brand of personal and spiritual fulfillment which Jack, as a recruiter, regularly preaches to his students. Committed (at least in theory) to "saving" or inspiring every graduating senior, Jack's message of salvation—that is, his message of personal growth—seems, on one hand, a commendable endeavor. Yet given his misanthropic response to organized religion and suburban culture, it seems difficult *not* to imagine Jack as a modern Svengali who fails to put his money where his mouth is. Figuring Levy along such lines offers a troublesome return to what Linda Nochlin considers the "hostile, denigrating, and debasing representation of Jews" as sites of ungovernable excess (7).[80] According to Nochlin, in the nineteenth century, various hand-pressed caricatures such as that offered by French lithographer Alphone Lévy and German artist Ludwig Knaus, depicted hunch-backed rabbis and wizened Jewish proctors as peons who loved to prey on supple youth. While decidedly less vampiric in his general comport, Jack nevertheless persists as a vessel of broad contradiction who perpetuates any number of Jewish stereotypes: at once learned and accomplished as an authority figure; while also unsavory, overweight, and mildly sinister.

Jews, wrote Sander Gilman, are always already defined by a "fantasy of difference" amongst non-Jewish entities (97).[81] When not singled out as inferior or

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[80] Nochlin, Linda. "Starting with the Self: Jewish Identity and its Representation." The Jew in the Text: Modernity and the Construction of Identity. Ed. Linda Nochlin & Tamar Garb. London: Thomas & Hudson, 1995.

[81] Gilman, Sander L. "Salome, Syphilis, Sarah Bernhardt, and the Modern Jewess." The Jew in the Text: Modernity and the Construction of Identity. Ed. Linda Nochlin & Tamar Garb. London: Thomas & Hudson, 1995: 97-120. See also Gilman, Sander L., The Jew's Body, New York and London: Routledge, 1991.

physically abject in the eyes of Christians (Jews, we may recall, have large noses, bushy eyebrows, ruddy chins, and beady eyes), Jewish individuals—or more precisely, lone Jewish males—are "indelibly marked and . . . therefore always recognizable" as dishonest, irresponsible, or avaricious (97). As a result of such positioning, the average Jew engages in what Gilman considers the Hebrew's primary, paradoxical desire: "to hide or disguise [one's] identity" from others (97). Salomon Perel (Marco Hofschneider), the hero of Agnieszka Holland's *Europa Europa* (1990), is a prime example of a Jew who seeks to hide his identity (and thus preserve his own life) whilst a member of Hitler's Youth. In *Terrorist*, a similar strategy exists, as, on the one hand, Jack's innocuous decision to occupy suburbia—and thus avoid the more cramped Jewish ghetto (New York City)—marks a significant turn toward gentile behavior far from the madding Hebrew crowd. By the same token, because Jack's desire to obliterate the community amounts to a near-apocryphal act of God, it is also quite possible that the disaffected Jew has openly embraced a queer or *terroristic* identity.

Updike too, as a man frequently informed by the pace of social progress, appears here to have conflated both the innate queerness of his aging protagonist with that of his own personal and professional insecurities. Speaking candidly during an interview with the London-based *Telegraph*, the frail septuagenarian reflected on the fading health of his intellectual faculties: in a profession where "nobody tells you to quit, [and] no board of other partners suggests that it's time to get your gold watch," the task falls upon the individual to "plug along on the theory that he can . . . still get published" despite critical opposition to the contrary. Acknowledging, therein, that after fifty years of practice, the writing process "gets to be a part" of one's daily routine, Updike's prolific literary

output—mechanized in many respects—ultimately resembles Jack's by-now routinary career of forsaken, imperiled expertise.[82] In his early seventies, Updike's later literary creations, most of it poetry, hinted at Levy-esque displays of disaffection. Consider, for example, the following lines from two of his final poems "Oblong Ghosts" and "Euonymus":

A wakeup call?
It seems that death has found the portals it will enter by: my lungs
pathetic oblong ghosts, one paler than
the other on the doctor's viewing screen.

* * * *

My house is now a cage
I prowl, window to window, as I wait
for time to take away the cloud within.[83]

In both examples, Updike's lengthy battle with cancer forms the presence and absence bifurcating the overall tenor of his writing. On the one hand, "Oblong Ghosts" posits the speaker's body as a "portal" or "pathetic" object currently assaulted by spectral pain and certain death. Like the comatose Rabbit in Florida, or Jack in his troubled waking state, the poem's speaker envisions himself as a violated site transformed by morbid spectacle. The enjambment in the stanza's third line further connotes an assault or hijacking of the speaker's body, as his compromised "lungs," plagued by disease, are

[82] Brown, Mick. "John Updike: An Appreciation." *The Telegraph*, 29 Jan. 2009. Web. 13 March 2010.
[83] Updike, John, "Oblong Ghosts" and "Euonymus," *The New Yorker* 85.5 (16 March 2009): 93.

shattered and wracked upon the page. In addition, the fact that speaker now finds himself the object of a doubly condemnatory mode of surveillance (double insofar as both his newly opened eyes and that of his bedside physician look upon *and through* his ruined form) suggests an all-pervasive abjection rooted in private pain and ceded upon the site of racial whiteness.

If "Oblong Ghosts" is to be imagined in terms of grand or debilitating victimization, than "Euonymus," in its chords of deep claustrophobia, conveys a powerful mix of rage and agitation. In *Terrorist*, Jack wants to prepare and "ready himself for death" like a man with little hope of escape. In "Euonymus," the frustrated speaker looks forward to the day when physical and/or spiritual release combines to manifest a path away from Earth and end his incessant "prowl" throughout his "cage." Gothic in both scope and imagery, "Euonymus" reveals a dark, highly personal realm in which the quiet vacillation between victimization and villainy manifests itself through savage, indeed *animalistic* associations reserved for those deemed monstrous or inhuman. In the final analysis, though nowhere near as nihilistic as Jack's dreams of a "good" suburban bomb, Updike's morbid sensibility implies similarly disruptive logic such that queerness *per se* manifests itself within a view of death as liberatory *telos*.

Up till now, this essay has focused on Jack, Rashid, and by extension Updike, as purveyors of "bad" education. As a closing gesture, I want to amplify my argument by encompassing Ahmad and his co-worker Charlie Chebab as figures of (doubly) queer possibility. Described as "a thick-set six-footer in his middle thirties," Charlie represents a paternal figure who takes an "interest" in his teenage colleague (145, 149). In the novel,

Ahmad visits Charlie about possible employment as a truck diver at a downtown furniture store. During their interview, Ahmad discovers that Charlie has been recently promoted to general manager in light of his father, Mr. Chebab's, recent illness. Short one man after the recent retirement of Charlie's uncle from the business, the younger Chebab hires Ahmad and initiates the latter's momentous journey into Paradise. During preliminary greetings, Ahmad considers his boss with a mixture of cautious admiration and respect: "[Charlie's] face as he talks expresses complicated mental currents like disdain, self-disparagement, suspicion, and (with lifted eyebrows) a good-humored awareness of himself and his listener being placed somehow in a compromised situation together" (146). What is "compromised" here is not just Ahmad's reproach of his hitherto effete and unattractive male pedagogues (i.e. Rashid and Jack), but also the formalized boundaries of teacher and pupil, speaker and listener, which preclude any hint of physical intimacy. Charlie, in being both "suspicious" and "good-humored," is a palimpsest of contradictions, a locus of desire, who remains simultaneously apprehensive of his unknown protégé, while also predisposed to treat Ahmad as a "brother" (157).

Throughout this exchange, the reader is invited to marvel at how Ahmad's often dispassionate gaze suddenly gives way to fetishistic and potentially lustful observations. Charlie, in Ahmad's eyes, is described as having "a broad and flexible mouth"; disarming and effusive charm (at one point, even "wink[ing]" at the young man in silent conspiracy); and later, a jubilant chortle erotically defined as Charlie "throw[s] back his head so the horseshoe arc of his upper teeth is displayed, and the grainy muscle of his tongue, like [that of] a broad worm," slowly coalesces into "a contemplative smirk" (146-148). Beneath the predatory heft of Charlie's gaze, Ahmad finds himself consumed by

rapturous enthrallment: his voice "shyly crack[s]" when responding to many of Charlie's questions; he "blush[es]" when the topic of sex is broached (Charlie explains that the upstairs level of the store is where "little," "softer" table lamps are stored "to go with what should happen in a bedroom"); and, while being "taken" out *back* "to see the truck, his future truck," is painfully aware of how the "magical" "space" of the vehicle's cab—what with its "leathery warm reek of male bodies and stale cigarette smoke and cold coffee"—is "somehow already familiar" to his virginal eyes: "He is in bed with Charlie, and submissively settles himself for the ride" (149, 150, 154, 157).

Worth noting is that the implicit power relations between the older, more experienced Charlie and that of the excited, though uninitiated Ahmad offers yet another example of queer education (or at the very least, male-male cruising) between two ostensibly "straight" and pure young men. Surrounded by the "reek" of masculinity and cigarettes, the well-worn "bed"-room which Charlie and Ahmad now occupy humorously parallels an act of consensual sex between a sure-handed daddy and his smaller, less confident son. While seated within the truck's cramped compartment, a flustered Ahmad instantly realizes that the truck lacks the prerequisite stick shift he learned about in class. "'How do we shift gears?'" he sheepishly asks his companion. "'We don't,'" responds Charlie, "'It's automatic. Just like in your friendly family car,'" a remark that not only underscores the disjunction between the *theory* of academia and more *practical* realm of reality ("Ahmad is surprised, after the hours studying the booklets for the CDL with all their talk of double-clutching and downshifting on perilous slopes, by the lack of a stick shift on the floor"), but also of the ingrained transgressiveness of Ahmad's desire to

"submit" to Charlie, and therein construct their own inverted semblance of "family" (154, 157).

While stopping just short of branding Ahmad a closeted homosexual, I do want to suggest that in his ongoing ability to refute the fantasy of reproductive futurism, the young Muslim teenager has become an intrinsically fluid gendered entity who resists all static, indeed essentialist, representation. At the novel's conclusion, when Ahmad, while strapped at the helm of his explosives-laden truck, is egged on by an agitated Jack to "Go ahead, [and] push [the] fucking button," the desire to annihilate the lives of nearby civilians within an "exhaust-darkened," crowded Lincoln Tunnel suggests perhaps the most anally explicit act of anti-futurity imaginable—the figurative sodomization of New York City through one of its dirtiest (and constipated) orificies—and repetition of Updike's "tunnel of death" motif.

Ahmad sees himself as less a delinquent individual, than a well-deserving messenger of Allah. Jack too, though not Islamic, sees in his impending demise a comparable degree of liberation: "I've become a drag on the world," he readily concedes. And now that he has effectively "run out of steam," has no reason or desire to live (304). It is within each individual's (self-)destructive desire that true queer potentiality emerges. Jack and Ahmad represent what Lee Edelman considers the true "meaning of homosexuality": "the violent undoing of meaning, the loss of identity and meaning, the unnatural access to jouissance" (*No Future* 132). For both individuals, the possibility of leaving the forsaken planet comes across as a rapturous and orgasmic "explo[sion]" or "fiat of Creation" wherein "one concentric wave after another, each pushing the other farther and farther out from the initial point of nothingness" proceeds to envelop each

protagonist (306). This act of "Creation," facilitated by the attendant specter of death, passes as an initiation into a brotherhood of hallowed (hollowed?) men with nothing (save misery) to lose. Out of "nothing," then, arrives *something*. And for Updike's two emotionally conjoined protagonists, the possibility of salvation appears well worth the cost of laying claim to infamy.

3

"An Ecstasy of Murder": Identity Politics and Queer Futurity in Michael Cunningham's *Specimen Days*

> *"Death."*
> *"Death?"*
> *"That's what I said."*
> *"Come again, sir. I don't get you."*
> *"I said death. I said, do you think about death a lot?"*
> *"Why no. Hardly at all. Why?"*
> *"The future—that's where death is."*
> - Christopher Isherwood, *A Single Man*

Michael Cunningham's *Specimen Days* begins its third and final narrative section with an episode of white male rape. In the episode, an American cyborg named Simon simulates a "level seven" assault of a visiting client as part of his employment with Dangerous Encounters Ltd., a Manhattan-based specialty service corporation offering private sexual fantasies to its patrons (202). Agile and muscular, laconic and bold, Simon is what's known as a "park thug": a lone white rakish "subprostitute" who earns a living turning tricks in Central Park (209, 202). On this particular occasion, the militant cyborg—in truth, far more pacifistic than violently inclined— half-heartedly approaches the evening's client—a bald, "corpulent, fiftyish" European—who has quietly entered Simon's lair unaccompanied.

Following protocol, the visiting patron is instantly accosted by his host: "You know what I want?" demands Simon, slamming his client against a nearby tree. "You want my money?" gasps the man in surprise. "Yeah, I want your money," hisses the cyborg quietly. That, and his "sweet…ass, too." As instructed, the terrified visitor boldly refuses his assailant's first demand: "I don't want to give you my money," he whines in excitement. "It's not about what you *want*," responds Simon, but how much he can extract before the man's sexual climax. With the whimpering "victim" now sporting a prominent "hard-on," Simon proceeds to slap the man's face, grab his crotch, and begin roughing him up profusely. Minutes later, upon offering a "delirious" "squeal" of ecstasy, the client collapses in exhaustion (207).

As part of a vibrant tourist industry in the context of Cunningham's dark and dystopic futurist vista, the spectacle of rape, particularly when occurring between male parties of intra-continental origin, represents an intriguing amplification of many of the themes governing this project in terms of modern masculinity and its crisis of traumatic representation. Unlike the previous two chapters in which the spectacle of masculinity is viewed in terms of a privileged, largely *heteronormative* white existence, the rape scene above reflects a vastly different libidinal economy emblematic of a yet un-illuminated or oft-ignored social stratum: that of the post-9/11 urban queer. As such, what I plan to provide here is a reading of Cunningham's text as a study of subaltern sexuality, queer liminality, and the erotics of bodily terror—a terror, that is, such as seen by a politically disadvantaged and even "monstrous" cyborg entity with neither a home nor futurity to speak of.

Mysterious Skin

To begin with, let's consider the case of Simon's liminality. As a product of American engineering built by an inventor named Emory Lowell, Simon and his kind, whereas initially built for service as "sturdy and reliable" human aide, have since been decommissioned after a series of unfortunate genomic defects grew manifest resulting in episodes of homicidal rage. Their societal status now reduced to that of subhuman, illegalized "nobod[ies]," Simon and his close companion Marcus (a fellow thug) subsist in derelict squalor amongst a carnivalesque "Old" New York underworld patrolled by punks, drunks, embittered old women, and streetwise pink-haired prostitutes. Old New York—and in particular the Lower East Side—is considered a transient space where the socially disadvantaged "temporarily" stay while awaiting their flight to far greener pastures (210). Reminiscent, at times, of Pete Hamill's *Forever* (2002), during which the City of New York is imagined as having expanded, evolved, and eventually collapsed on the morning of September 11, Cunningham's neo-noir vision of Manhattan skirts familiar terrain in treating both the city and its boroughs as a hospice or prison for the morally bereft.

Like the anonymous "parade of hunters" in John Rechy's *City of Night* who prowl, stalk, suck, and fuck other men under darkness, Simon's behavior impinges upon a tradition of anonymous sex and public interaction that lent early- to mid-twentieth century gay subculture much of its lascivious heft. Up until the arrival of "gay cancer" in the mid-1980s, urbanized street scenes, parks, bath houses and beaches functioned as clandestine meeting grounds or "social scenes" for men to engage in and solicit sexual trysts. As cultural historian George Chauncey observes: "It was in such open [urban]

spaces, less easily regulated than a residential or commercial venue, that much of the gay world took shape. The city's streets and parks served as vital meeting grounds for men who lived with their families or in cramped quarters with few amenities, and the vitality and diversity of the gay street scene attracted many other men as well."[84]

According to Chauncey, in the early twentieth century, many gay street scenes were notable for their blend of subterfuge and yeomen deception. Indeed, at a point in time when roving bands of police forces were tightening their control over areas deemed quiet and ideal for cruising, savvy gay subjects, many of them consigned to non-descript, blue-collar occupations, utilized the bustling city sidewalks and myriad tourist destinations (Union Square, Herald Square, Columbus Circle, Harlem's Seventh Avenue, and 135th Street) as pick-up spots or scenes for prostitution. It was not unusual, writes Chauncey, for many city newcomers to form friendships with more "experienced" men of action, engaging in trips into dim-lit alleys or subway restrooms before heading on back to their apartment. Generally speaking, such furtive behavior relied on gazing, nodding, and covert foot-tapping to move both hurriedly and unmarked throughout the city (Chauncey 180-81). At the slightest hint of danger, each participant would scatter and blend in with the crowd.

If, for more than a few gay men, finding a john on the crowded streets was considered something of a nuanced art, the semi-private purview of city parks, many of them pocketed by foliage and shadow, was considerably less daunting and more rewarding. Under cover of innocuous heteronormative displays (picnics, lunch breaks, social gatherings, sports), gay male cruising took place as an act simultaneously seen and

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[84] Chauncey, George. Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World. New York: Basic Books, 1994: 179.

not seen by others not previously initiated. In Central Park alone, the impressive, often solitary splendor of Belvedere Castle (located on the West Lawn at 81st Street), the Naumburg Bandshell (just south of Bethesda Terrace), the legendary Loeb Boathouse (on the northeastern tip of the Lake) and hermetic Cherry Hill were all preferred destinations where "painted queens" and "rosy sisters" could congregate sans threats of hostile violence. Elsewhere in town, such venerable sites as Grant's Tomb and Soldiers and Sailors Monument in Riverside Park; Bryant Park (behind the New York Public Library); Battery Park (just off the Staten Island Ferry); Bronx Park (at 180th Street); and Prospect Park (in Brooklyn) were wildly popular amongst locals and tourists seeking to take advantage of such legendary exploits. Concludes Chauncey: in the carnivalesque setting of the urban park, barriers of language, education, religion, and money were submerged in favor of more universal, primitive needs.

In *Specimen Days*, Michael Cunningham accesses a similar paradigm by holding that in the not-too-distant future, at a time when Christian fundamentalists have "won an election" and "regained their majority on the [City] Council," the "increas[ed] stringency of law enforcement" officials against "simulos," "artificials," and various other "illegal" entities—an echo perhaps of the replicants in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982)—has created a moment of deep apprehension (if not allegorical significance) for a Bush-directed, Patriot Act-era America. At one point in the novel, when Simon and Marcus convene to discuss the current state of affairs, the latter complains of being followed that morning by a security drone near the Central Park band shell: "I sweat it hovered over me, for, like, almost a minute," laments Marcus in mounting desperation (208). Just as in the case of Chauncey's early twentieth-century johns, so, more than a century later, the

visible policing of sex and sexual desire re-emerges as a cyclical pattern of oppression. Try as he might, a heavily concerned Simon is unable to shake his friend of his ineffable gloom: "Because I could not stop for death," claims Marcus, "He kindly stopped for me" (211). It is here, within such arresting Dickinsonian poetics, that the full correlation between contemporary America's seemingly boundless culture of oppression conflates with the nightmarish politics inundating Cunningham's text to create a withering critique of "homeland security."

At the same time, by focusing in on two subjects who appear otherwise superfluous to mainstream society, *Specimen Days* invites us to consider the plight of queer subjectivity as viewed through the threat of constant (and abrasive) federal surveillance. Rather than arguing, however, for a reading of queerness on the grounds of Simon's role as a serial rapist (an approach Susan Brownmiller has famously argued as flawed or largely futile), I want to instead consider his status as a cyborgic entity and the innate indeterminacy so implied within that *telos*. In "A Cyborg Manifesto," Donna Harraway writes that "A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" who transcends "natural" or otherwise essentialized definitions of gender (149). Incorporating the metaphor of cybernetics into a discussion of women and late twentieth-century social oppression, Harraway offers a compelling case for radically redefining gendered subjectivity as less a static or *indelible* social construct than a "conscious coalition, of affinity, of political kinship" allowing for multiple permutations or derivatives of identity. As a physical manifestation of what Harraway considers a "condensed image of both imagination and material reality," the cyborg harbingers a utopian possibility

beyond the agonizing boundaries of material production, reproduction, illness, and death that currently impede or at the very least define the limits of human life as such.[85]

In Harraway's schema, the cyborg occupies an enviable position of being "a creature in a post-gender world"—which is to say, a creature holding "no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour [*sic*], or [any] other seductions to organic wholeness" currently framing individual identity (150). Unlike humans, the cyborg is born with neither a father nor mother to speak of. It is a piece of technology divorced from the general matrix of reproductive politics and fashioned as antithetical to futurity as such. Given this stance, it becomes all the more plausible to imagine the cyborg as an autonomous or otherwise *self-sufficient* apparatus whose general disregard for both the "dream of community on the model of the organic family" and basic human need of preservation begets an eventual coloring of the cyborg as inherently queer and resistant to heteronormative ideology (151).

Recently, as film scholar Scott Bukatman has explained, the tendency amongst critics to read the cyborg as ideologically (or implicitly) subversive has allowed numerous interventions into female identity, agency, and sexual desire coded within the realm of the fabulous.[86] Less pronounced however (though still thematically coherent) is the analysis of cyborgic *men*—men whose co-opted physiques ostensibly imply a fundamental loss of organic self-sufficiency. In truth however, these fetishized bodies—whether digitized gladiators, time-traveling assassins, renegade amusement park sheriffs, or reanimated police officers—are often envisioned as templars of "straight" masculinity

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[85] Harraway, Donna J. "A Cyborg Manifesto." Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature. London: Routledge, 1990: 149-182.
[86] Bukatman, Scott. Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.

"signifying nothing beyond [themselves]" (Bukatman 244). Representative therein of what Bukatman considers a nationwide obsession with cybernetic fusion, narratives of science fiction, whether housed in cinema or fiction, have often invoked the metaphor of mechanized bodies in order to discuss the role of biological life in a culture overrun by technology.

Along with such thinking, Marshall McLuhan has argued that contemporary society transforms the individual body in an oft-contested, hybridized being who "wear[s] all mankind on its skin" (47). This, in turn, because it arises in response to a continuous "shrinking" of the civilized planet, begets the general commodification of the consumer body via the trafficking of material production.[87] Within such encapsulated trappings, the mainstream media comes to co-opt public agency via a process of diffuse domestication, a process which simultaneously colonizes the body (and therein strips it of its organic independence) while also equating human life to an "assembly line" (46). Individuality, in other words, is deemed impossible.

As part of an ongoing response to the perceived routinization of organic identity, the realm of science fiction (whose parameters Cunningham has clearly mined) have adopted what, in Vivian Sobschack's eyes, amounts to the fantasy of outer "space"—whether cyber, galactic, geographic or imaginary—embedded within a neo-colonialist dream of gender performance.[88] Speaking specifically of 1970s science fiction, film scholar Joan F. Dean has explained that many high-profile narratives (including *The*

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[87] McLuhan, Marshall. Understanding Media. London: Sphere Books, 1971.

[88] In Screening Space, Sobschack proposes to read the realm of outer space as a canvas for a number of phallocentric fantasies in which manhood itself (or the male body in particular) struggled to overcome the voluminous, consumptive, intrinsically feminized threat of a wild and untamed deep beyond.. Here, it so appeared, was the "final frontier" where men failed in their attempts at domestication. For further details see: Sobschack, Vivian. Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film. New York: Ungar, 1987: 223-226.

Omega Man, *Star Wars, Westworld,* and *Soylent Green*) reflected "a developing neo-isolationism (perhaps a result of a costly involvement in Southeast Asia); a diminishing fear of nuclear apocalypse (partially a result of the thaw in the Cold War); and a growing concern with domestic, territorial issues—most of which are related to totalitarian government control of people's lives or to over-population, food shortages…and pollution" which struck many as a priority of the time.[89] Just as in the case of horror in the 1960s, an interest in "domesticated" quandaries brought the purview of science fiction back onto the mantle of the human body and issues of individual sustainability.

In the 1970s, masculinity's social health ran a treacherous path toward extinction. Feminism's emergence, along with the clamor for civil rights, implied a symbolic affront to the politics of patriarchy and foundation of masculinity as such. In addition, the recent upsurge in both industry and technology threatened to displace many laborers from their well-paid jobs and replace them with cheaper machinery. As many union chiefs were want to insist, it was a time of great consternation. Yet even as masculinity saw itself reduced to near-figurative collapse, many male subjects found a comfortable semiotic within the mantle of cyborgic identity. In cinema, explains Claudia Springer, the celluloid representation of a desirable (though perhaps not *desirous*) male body "hardened" or modified by technology upheld a number of normative gender roles (of a "stable" and suddenly secure masculinity) ostensibly triumphant over forces of oppression.[90] Scott Bukatman, in the meantime, adds that the cyborg is also "a killing machine, whether nasty (*Terminator*) or nice (*Robocop*, *Terminator 2*)," whose said ability to alter

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[89] Dean, Joan F. "Between 2001 and Star Wars." Journal of Popular Film and Television. 7.1 (1978): 36-37.
[90] Springer, Claudia. "Muscular Circuitry: The Invincible Armored Cyborg in Cinema." *Genders* 18 (Winter 1993): 87-101. See also Chapter Four of Electronic Eros: Bodies and Desires in the Postindustrial Age. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996.

surrounding lives—or even the future itself—personifies a fantasy of individual mastery (301).

With two of the nation's most popular cyborgs, Arnold Schwarzenegger's Terminator and Peter Weller's RoboCop, offering parallel narratives of triumph over great adversity, it's easy to see how the metaphor of cyborgism inveigled its way to the fore of popular culture. In what was essentially a reprisal of Thatcherism's commitment to economic vitality, President Reagan promoted reduced federal spending, widespread tax cuts, and a free market economic policy in order to combat the specter of growing inflation which threatened to derail the country. As cultural theorist Stuart Hall has explained, Thatcherism—like Reaganism—proposed a "responsible, patriarchal, entrepreneurial subject with…orthodox tastes, inclinations, preferences, opinions and prejudices as the stable subjective bedrock" upon which "national identity" was forged.[91] More importantly, in its ongoing aspirations to populist acclaim, such conservative-minded politics privileged a narrow-minded, largely intolerant display of citizenship ostensibly dismissive of or largely resistant to all non-white, non-masculine social elements—a fact which Reagan himself often referenced in his claims of leading life "as a man."

With each film debuting at the height of the Reagan Revolution, both *Terminator* (James Cameron, 1984) and *Robocop* (Paul Verhoeven, 1987) reflected, in Susan Jeffords' eyes, "a crisis in the national body" for which straight, white, middle class men were imagined as directly affected.[92] A stern rebuttal of what the former Hollywood star considered a "soft" and bloated federal praxis under Carter, the Reagan Revolution

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[91] Hall, Stuart. The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left. London: Verso, 1988: 8.
[92] Jeffords, Susan. Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000: 37.

introduced a robust, largely *bodily* wave of nationalism that augured for both an overall fortification of the American people and return of U.S. prominence in global politics—behavior seemingly outside the reach of Reagan's more effete White House predecessor and his failures in both Panama and Iran.

Coinciding with Reagan's wishes of being bold and socially progressive was an equally adamant attempt (bolstered in large part by Robert Bly) of restoring "natural" moral values to the nation. Indeed, at a time when "presumed *non*-values" of technological innovation ostensibly "corrupted" or "cheapened" human life, fear of "mechanized" corporations proved not only prevalent in mainstream cinema, but speeches by the President as well (Jeffords 104). As Jeffords explains, in a decade of virulent anti-Soviet propaganda and emphasis on gender as nationalist display, the fantasy of technological-mediation (i.e. of the body as co-opted by machinic Others) was read as a "foreign, alien, or nonhuman" assault against both the nation and democracy itself (106). America was in the midst of an ideological war. And to many Hollywood producers and directors at the time, such tensions created narrative growth. In a film such as *Rambo: First Blood, Part 2* (Ted Kotcheff, 1982), for example, the notion of a bodily struggle between forces of freedom and those of communist enslavement transpires as a harrowing fight between John J. Rambo (Sylvester Stallone) and combined Russian and Vietnamese armed forces. In the film, Rambo, a former Green Beret and now prisoner in federal custody, is brought back into the fold by his former superior, Colonel Samuel Troutman (Richard Crenna), and tasked with rescuing a camp of American POWs.

In keeping with the theme of American vulnerability, Rambo is given no support team to speak of, nor accoutrements to combat his enemies. By contrast, his Vietnamese

opponents are equipped with Uzis, knives, and AK47 machine guns, while the Russians—outside of a hulking, early laconic individual named Yushin—sport hand grenades, torture apparatuses, and shortwave military-grade technology. Despite a sizable disadvantage—including physical inferiority to his automaton Russian counterpart (who, at 6 foot-1 inch, dwarfs Stallone by nearly half-a-foot)—the intrepid All-American relies on cunning and *natural* abilities to defeat his manifold foes. As Jeffords observes: "Though [publicly] referred to…as 'a pure fighting machine,' Rambo prefers to think of his brain and not his body as his most important asset" (38-39).

In so depicting such improbable triumph, *First Blood: Part 2* all but reaffirmed to U.S. audiences the Reagan Administration's idealized belief in marrying external strength with internal resolve and its attendant social policy of nationalism. Under Reagan, the nation was manifestly a visual body measured by style and substance. In *First Blood: Part 2*, however, simply bearing the mark of muscular heft is not enough to imply nationalist status; "real" American subjects—those who triumph under the darkest of circumstances—know when to marry such exterior worth with more "organic" interiority and emerge from such adversity still intact. Thus, while ostensibly complimentary in terms of strength and overall physical prowess, from an ideological point of view, Rambo and Yushin could not be any more dissimilar as representatives of democracy and communism respectively. Put differently, in his myopic and often laconic on-screen presence, the hardened Russian sergeant is inextricably linked to the affectless, potentially inhuman machine of communism that attempts, but never quite succeeds, in matching a superior and more cerebral brand of democracy. Rambo is triumphant, then, in the final analysis, because he succeeds in maintaining the sense of moral and

intellectual rigor that Reagan deemed central to American life. Without such critical standards, the nation was no better off than Russia.

By the late-1980s, such thinking was largely *a priori*. With the arrival of *Robocop*, however, in 1987, the notion of a "foreign" cyborg body and its political significance came home to roost within the nation. In the film, the spectacular transformation of a dying police officer named Alex Murphy (Peter Weller) into a mechanized body built and owned by a paramilitary corporation called OCP—Omni Consumer Products, speaks to the rampant anxieties of many U.S. citizens who saw profit-driven corporations gaining power under mass Reaganomics. OCP, led by its sinister CEO Richard Jones (Ronny Cox), has successfully made in-ways with the Detroit police, hospitals, prisons, and military as part of its implicit corporate policy of dominance. For Verhoeven, it is precisely this process that offers a telling glimpse into the inhuman side of corporate politics: the treatment of clients and employees as dispensable.

An accomplished member of the South Detroit Police Force on loan to help out in the North, Murphy's horrifying execution at the hands of a drug czar named Clarence Bodicker (Kurtwood Smith) is made all the more startling when we discover the true identity of his assassin's clandestine employer: none other than Dick Jones himself. The aging CEO, who foresees himself as heir apparent to the Omni Consumer Products Chairmanship, believes that by supplying Detroit's riff-raff with access to drugs, money, and military-grade technology, the company's good Samaritan instincts will allow its employees to quickly step in and "save" the city from imminent collapse. Such, reasons Jones, is how OCP can help "rebuild" (i.e. cleanse) old Detroit.

Seen from afar, *Robocop* presents a number of issues timely to 1980s America. In the first instance, amidst rising unemployment and concerns of lengthy financial decline, the idea of corporate malfeasance (or even executive corruption) was, for many, a frightening reality. In addition, with Wall Street's Black Friday all but decimating investor portfolios, even long-standing banks faced growing concerns about a need for more public transparency.[93] In *Robocop*, a similar feat occurs, as the newly-hewn "super cop," despite obvious improvements, is viewed apprehensively by colleagues: "This guy is really good," concedes an awestruck officer. "He's not a guy," responds another, "he's a machine." The fear for these men is that corporate technology will soon replace human flesh altogether. Not only, they surmise, will men have to contend with the threat of bodily co-optation, but also the distinct possibility that even their thoughts will be subject to digital enslavement. In many ways, then, Verhoeven's tale is a study of organic liminality; a study, that is, of the future of human life, its relationship to technology, and threat of capitalist forces on modernity. Simultaneously, such thinking is also a critique of the Reagan Era's emphasis on family, including, but not limited to, the family's normative status as a model unit and barometer for masculine expression.

In *Robocop*, Murphy's loss is not merely his death at the hands of heavily-armed criminals, but the loss of a house, wife, and devoted son who exemplify American self-fashioning. Not only, it seems, has this suburbanite's body bore the brunt of *two* technological assaults (once by criminals' bullets and then again by cybernetic implants), but also by a corporatized menace whose backroom deals invited such disaster in the first place. What one finds is thus a crisis in the representation of middle-class identity. Under

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[93] Ryan, Michael and Douglas Kellner. Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.

Reagan, the nation underwent a significant visual overhaul. As Roland Barthes might suggest, the spectacle of revolution, itself a superficial structure built to "utter [a] message" of myth, implied a privileged and perhaps elite social status to which the nation and world were beholden.[94]

But the President's agenda was also suffused with an emphasis on middle-class values. Borrowing from Andrew Jackson, Reagan promised a populist campaign built upon new wave conservatism. As Gary Willis writes, "Reagan united the fissiparous movement around his radiant personality" and message of humanity and "hope" (ix). Up till then, modern conservatism had all but waned thanks to cold (William F. Buckley Jr.), disaffected (Barry Goldwater) or paranoid (Nixon) politicians plagued by their myriad shortcomings. What Reagan may have lacked in intelligence or passion was more than made up for by his confident rhetoric ("Nothing is impossible") and focus on the unwritten future.[95] Reagan's was a policy of utopian faith. Or one, as award-winning journalist William Kleinknecht has suggested, that parlayed the faith and optimism of "main street America" into free-for-all, grand exploitation.[96]

In his speeches, Reagan promised the common individual faire representation in Congress. But while ostensibly enchanting, Reagan's "rendezvous with destiny" relied upon near-impossible promise.[97] Thanks to his economic policy, America was now a free-market society inundated by manifest self-interest. The American home was struggling to stay afloat, as free-wheeling companies shed older workers and sought a

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[94] Barthes, Roland. Mythologies. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972: 109
[95] Willis, Gary. Reagan's America. New York: Penguin, 1985.
[96] Kleinknecht, William. The Man Who Sold the World: Ronald Reagan and the Betrayal of Main Street America. New York: Nation Books, 2009.
[97] Shirley, Craig. Rendezvous with Destiny: Ronald Reagan and the Campaign that Changed America. Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2009.

younger, less expensive human workforce. Gender, too, was now rooted in a modicum of flux as masculine identity became an affectless shell measured solely by its breadwinning prowess. Interiority, suffice to say, was non-existent.

Robocop pointedly disrupts such thinking in its portrayal of more affective masculinity. In the film, despite an unwanted brainwashing by OCP officials (a requirement of the cybernetic process), Murphy is confronted by disjointed memories of his house and family in the suburbs. Fleeing the Detroit Police station, the agitated hero races home only to find his house abandoned. It is here, on the site of so many pleasurable achievements, that Murphy experiences a second wave of nostalgia capable of moving him to tears; a display which single-handedly undermines the stoic façade dominating (indeed defining) Reagan iconography. In *The Political Unconscious*, Frederic Jameson read history as a pulsive force that "hurts" and "refuses desire" in the subject. Jameson's claim was that history proceeds as the "ground and untranscendable horizon" upon which narrative and readership are based.[98] In *Robocop*, history is imagined as a liberatory force whose poignant interpellation undermines the White House's view of an "irrelevant" past (a frequent Reagan mantra) and American masculinity governed therein solely by the present.

On the one hand, then, *Robocop* is distinctive for its view of masculinity as three-dimensional. More than just a surface built to reflect an impervious air, Murphy's masculinity verges on feminized, disruptive, even queer potentiality in its embrace of unexpected gender complexity. Having said this, it is also worth noting that as an officer of the law Murphy's male subjectivity ostensibly suggests more "normal" (i.e. straight) identification, behavior whose singular purpose of ensuring social order speaks to

[98] Jameson, Frederic. The Political Unconscious. London: Routledge, 1981: 90.

reproductive futurism as such. As a figure who embodies "the best of both worlds, the fastest reflexes modern technology has to offer, on-board computer assisted memory, and a lifetime of on-the-street law enforcement programming," Robocop doesn't simply *protect* the future he all but *controls* it with a click of the trigger. Like *Terminator 2*'s T-101 (Arnold Schwarzenegger), who, not coincidentally, also fights to save the future (indeed, at one point, Sarah Connor describes the Terminator as a surrogate "father" to her child), these two iconic figures suggest that what is ultimately to be admired in the technologically-mediated body is each man's ability to overcome perceived (or in this case literal) co-optation, while also embracing one's patriarchal status.

Enter *Specimen Days*. And what one finds is a narrative successfully troubling this gender paradigm, thanks to its two male cyborgs as sentient beings sans any patriarchal thrust. In the novella's opening passage, while standing in Central Park for his "general menacing," Simon observes a green-skinned Nadian arriving with two small human children. "She might have been beautiful," observes the omniscient narrator, "'Beautiful' was of course an approximation" (199):

> He saw her every evening, walking the children through the park. She always came at the same time, just after his shift started. She was modest but certain in her movements. Her skin was emerald. It had a clean gemlike shine rare among the Nadians. Most were mossier-looking. Their skins were more mottled, prone to splotches of ocher and dark brown. This was why people insisted that they were oily and that they smelled. They were not oily. They did not smell. They did not smell *bad*. All creatures

> smelled. The Nadian smell was sweet and cleanly fermented. Most people never got close enough to know that. (Cunningham 199)

Here, as the opening emphasis on surface suggests a limit to the cognitive nature of Simon's vision, a careful, oddly empirical facet of his gaze promotes an unusually fetishized interest in an aging Other as opposed to the normalized bodies of the children. Described as unruly and obstreperous (even by childhood standards), the two young humans, a four-year-old boy named Tomcruise and his three-year-old sister Katemoss, signify a purview of society seemingly beyond Simon's reach in his role as a self-sufficient entity.

The postmodern equivalent of nineteenth century slaves, Simon and Marcus, in lacking both political recognition and mobility, now find themselves targets of federal efforts at maintaining the growth of the nation. In concert with the recent Christian upsurge all but authorizing a cyborg bounty, the type of nervous conditions under which each character toils—of being constantly policed or forced into servitude—reflects an uncomfortable form of citizenship girded by the ever-present threat of destruction. This in turn, when considering that neither individual is built as procreative or *productive* in the conventional sense, suggests that in both figures' fear of hovering death (and really, their constant emulation of life), Simon and Marcus inadvertently mimic the gay male subject's ostensive disaffection and proclivity or "drive" toward death; a death, that is, which takes AIDS as its ominous marker.[99]

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[99] Butler's exact words are as follows: "The male homosexual is figured time and time again as one whose desire is somehow structured by death, either as the desire to die, or as one whose desire is inherently punishable by death." See Butler, Judith. "Sexual Inversions." Foucault and the Critique of Institution. Eds. John D. Caputo and Mark Young. 81-98. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993: 83.

In making this claim, it is interesting to consider what role, if any, the green-scaled Nadian plays in relation to the two male cyborgs. Like Simon, Catareen is a social outsider presently in but never of the natural Earth. An exiled rebel, banished for her role in the female resistance on planet Nourthea, Catareen is imagined as a "glorious" figure to whom Simon assigns historical import (199). To others, however, even despite her remarkable background, Catareen is received with a mixture of fear, apprehension, and in some cases repulsion based on her superficial otherness. At four-and-a-half-feet-tall, with lizard-like features and razor-sharp talons, it is easy to see how such uncanny traits would posit Catareen as abject. And yet for all such formidable accoutrements, the Nourthean exile is still very much a subject cast as pathetic and vulnerable. At the end of the novel, after Simon and Catareen manage to complete their escape to Denver, Simon is informed of his traveling partner's mortality after a century's worth of legendary exploits: within weeks, even days, it will be time for Catareen to "sleep."

Here, within her governing status as a figure of death, Catareen's significance to the text emerges. Speaking purely in terms of symbolism, as a fabulous (and potentially harmful) entity fast at the end of her rope, the aging Nadian, notable for her sickly hue and monstrous physicality, might ultimately represent a metaphor for AIDS on a planet now recognized as inhospitable to humans. In Denver, we may recall, Simon and Catareen are greeted by a wizened Emory Lowell, his wife Othea, and a selective group of children diligently setting about preparing a spacecraft for travel. Like Noah and his Ark, Lowell is preparing to shuttle his passengers to a bold "new world" sans disease or corruption: "We've had visions," he explains, "We've been seeing a world of mountains and rivers. We see enormous fruit-bearing trees. We see brilliantly colored birds and

small, intelligent animals that are like rabbits. I had the first such vision several years ago, and when I told Othea about is she confessed that she had had a similar one, months earlier, but hadn't mentioned it" (275, 278).

Within such Edenic imagery, an implicit condemnation of Earth reaffirms Catareen's status as specter of manifest decadence. In addition, as a full-time nanny, the exiled émigré embodies a shadowy presence, or liminal construct, who always already threatens, but never quite succeeds, in affecting (infecting?) the nuclear family. Lifelong residents of the San Remo estates (a complex overlooking Central Park), Tomcruise and Katemoss, as children of "administrators" and harried "CEOs," represent the "privileged few" (i.e. politically connected) who reside in sheltered bliss above the masses (218). Yet despite such ostensive remove, both individuals are still continuously exposed to the presence of an alien Other; or more precisely, a monstrous being who lives *with* each child high atop their insulated bower.

As critics such as Simon Watney, Douglas Crimp, or Thomas Yingling have explained, AIDS and its cultural representation has long been suffused with overtures of innate monstrosity.[100] For each of these critics, the ongoing atrophy of the infected, particularly when appearing during the halcyon days of the 1980s, framed the demonized victim as either a (closeted) homosexual, feeble hemophiliac, or indiscriminate (because unsanitary) drug user—categories neither impermeable nor exclusive in the eyes of an hysterical public. Thanks to the national popularity of Randy Shilts's *And the Band Played On* (1988), the public perception of homosexuals, particularly one as scurrilous as

[100] See for example Watney, Simon, Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS, and the Media, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997; Crimp, Douglas, AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988; Yingling, Thomas, "AIDS in America: Postmodern Governance, Identity, and Experience." In Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories. Ed. Diana Fuss. London: Routledge, 1991: 291-310.

Gaetan Dugas (a.k.a. Patient Zero), the French-Canadian air steward who allegedly spread "gay cancer" in revenge, had the unfortunate effect of labeling the Queer a criminal sociopath and horseman of imminent apocalypse.[101]

According to Shilts, in the years leading up to his infection, Gaetan Dugas had sex with literally hundreds of individuals, often without the aid of contraception. Tall, blonde, and exceedingly handsome, it was easy for the self-assured hedonist to identify his prey, charm them with grace, and initiate a sojourn toward the bedroom. Concedes Shilts: Dugas was "what every man wanted from gay life" (439). Once infected, however, Dugas grew far more insidious. Indeed, in August 1980, after seeing a dermatologist to remove a lesion from the back of his ear, the twenty-seven year old flight attendant was diagnosed with Kaposi's sarcoma, a rare form of skin cancer considered fatal by almost every account. Part out of shock, part defiance, Dugas rejected such a grim prognosis by insisting that he was strong both physically and mentally. Believing, if given the chance, that he would find "a way around this cancer," Dugas proceeded to lead his life just as he had for years: weekends at the shore, evenings at the bathhouse, mornings finding trade in the bars (Shilts 22).

Suffice it to say, sex was an integral part of the French-Canadian's identity. And for a man who often joked to friends of being "the prettiest [boy in the bar]," the thought that his once-flawless skin should be indelibly marred proved more than enough—indeed the motivating factor—in crafting thoughts of untoward revenge (21). At one point in the text, after intercourse with a patron in the bowels of a San Francisco bathhouse, Dugas "reache[s] up for the lights, turn[s] up the rheostat" and makes "a point of eyeing the

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[101] Shilts, Randy. And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic. New York: Penguin Books, 1988.

purple lesions on his chest" (198). "Maybe you'll get it too," he suggests matter-of-factly, reflecting what Jeff Nunokama, in his study of AIDS and mourning, has considered "the lethal prophecy" of gay identity in America.[102]

Dugas's nonchalance in such matters conflates a number of issues relevant to monstrous subjectivity. First and foremost, contends Leo Bersani, AIDS's cultural presence carries forth as a limit event or brand of exclusion long defined in terms of ever-painful loss. Once infected, laments Bersani, a given individual is afforded no quarter or reprieve, let alone a sense of dignity to help. The irony, of course, is that in its uncanny ability to "mark" or smear the subject's body, AIDS has succeeded in making all the more visible a community defined by obfuscation—all of which is to say that in its ability to frighten, horrify, and even divide a given community, AIDS has become an "essentializing imperative" from which the Queer is inextricably beholden.[103]

In speaking specifically of queer identity and the onus of abjection in the public sphere, Diana Fuss has argued that the epistemological invocation of queerness as a point of reference is inherently open to accusations of recapitulating the very same set of essentialist hermeneutics long envisioned as reductive or ornate. Indeed, according to Fuss, one cannot "speak so simply of ["queer" and "straight" subjectivity] as if these categories were not transgressed, not already constructed by other axes of [social] difference (class, culture, ethnicity, nationality…)" or threat of alternative possibilities.[104] Concurs critical theorist Jonathan Keane: "[For many of] those marginalized by cultural hegemony," the question of "experienc[ing] identity" as a kind of tenuous "self-presence"

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[102] Nunokawa, Jeff. "'All the Sad Young Men': AIDS and the Work of Mourning." Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories. Ed. Diana Fuss. London: Routledge, 1991: 313.
[103] Bersani, Leo. Homos. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995: 12.
[104] Fuss, Diana. Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference. New York: Routledge, 1989: 28.

occurs only in terms of a "negative element" deemed always amorphous or parenthetically obtuse.[105]

My reading of queerness considers the "negative" desires of each of Cunningham's protagonists an affront to heteronormative sociability. Simon's queerness is by now sufficiently pronounced within his aforementioned textual liminality. In Catareen's case, however, her queer subjectivity warrants further, indeed nuanced consideration. To reiterate an earlier claim: as a figure in the throes of physical atrophy and companion to the abject Queer, the aging Nadian represents an implicit utopian fantasy built upon the death or eradication of AIDS. One should note here, of course, that in making this claim, I do not merely attach an essentialist definition to Catareen as a *manifestation* of the disease; but rather, following Judith Halberstam, as a monstrous body, summarily overdetermined, and upon which "the fragments of otherness" are placed (92).[106] As Halberstam sees it, far from acting in a text as a "deliberate" site informed by sexual difference, the monstrous body holds forth as a powerful amalgamation of socio, political, and cultural elements housed within a single construct. As a result of such diffuse saturation, the monstrous body all but resists proscriptive categories (race, gender, religion, and sexuality) purporting to limit social status. Concludes Halberstam: "The monster always represents the disruption of categories, the destruction of boundaries, and the presence of impurities [calling for critical redress]" (27).

If we accept, then, for the sake of argument, Catareen's status as the figural abject, then her demise at story's end—described as an "ecstatic release" more powerful

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[105] Keane, Jonathan. "AIDS, Identity, and the Space of Desire." *Textual Practice* 7.4 (1993): 382.
[106] Halberstam, Judith. Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.

than an orgasm—becomes, strangely enough, less an *affective* loss of life than cause for "celestial" celebration. Within such sublime and otherwise uncanny narrative fantasy, Catareen's exodus doubles as both an inaugural moment of epochal change and point of social *progress* for the Queer, a state further imagined in the following passage on the night of Catareen's passing:

> [Simon] dreamed that he stood in a high place. It was bright and windy. In the dream he could not determine whether he was on a mountain or a building. He knew only that he was standing on something solid and that the earth was far below. From where he stood he could see people walking across a plain. They were distant, and yet he could see them perfectly. They were men and women and children. They were all going in the same direction. They were leaving something behind. He could just barely make it out. It was a darkness, a sense of gathering storm, far away, shot through with flashes of light, green-tinted, unhealthy, small shivers and bursts of light that appeared and disappeared in the roil of cloudy darkness. The people were walking away from it, but he could not see what it was they were moving toward. A brilliant wind blew against him, and he could only face into it. He could only look at that which the people were fleeing. He hoped they were going to something better. He imagined mountains and forests, rivers, a pure windswept cleanliness, but he could not see it. He could only see the people walking through the grass. He could only see what was on their faces: hope and fear and determination, a furious

> ardency he could not put a name to. The wind grew louder around him. He understood that the wind in his dream was the sound of a spacecraft, departing for another world. (Cunningham 302)

Earlier in this project, Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" was invoked to show how Art Spiegelman's 9/11 tribute represented an abrupt reversal of the process of historical materialism and trajectory of messianic teleology. *In the Shadow of No Towers*, it was suggested, cleverly inverted Benjamin's paradigm by showing backward (as opposed to forward) propulsion into the familiar "safety" of material history—or more precisely, early twentieth-century newspaper comic strips. *Specimen Days* offers a far more conventional Benjaminian arc (i.e. of the past moving directly into the present), but it too is concerned with an uncanny present viewed by the author as confounding and surreal. In its vivid dimensions, Simon's dream offers an array of symbolic and/or metaphorical exigencies relevant to the text's social focus; in particular, the undiscovered "darkness" and "unhealthy" "storm" (of politics, terrorism, disease, corruption) threatening to broach the horizon. Like Benjamin's Angel of History, then, who surveys "rubble on top of rubble" at its feet, Simon is made aware of a death-marred past littered with the ghosts of catastrophe. In the particular case of AIDS, the men and women and children he sees fleeing from the "gathering" darkness might ultimately represent those liberated from the virus's shadow (relatives, spouses, partners of victims), if not representatives of the nuclear family.

To Cunningham, however, it is not nearly enough to imagine a post-AIDS America as kinder or more conducive to family life. The planet, he proposes, even

despite such a marked occurrence, is still plagued by a number of debilitating traumas which continue to make the landscape inhospitable. What is interesting about Simon's dream is how much of the imagery contained within the narrative—of standing high above earth and watching people walk across a "plain"—revolves around a pun on "plain"—or plane—tangentially referencing 9/11 or an age of global terrorism as such. "It was a darkness," writes Cunningham, "a sense of gathering storm, far away, shot through with flashes of light, green-tinted, unhealthy, small shivers and bursts of light that appeared and disappeared in the roil of cloudy darkness." Here, within such turbulent imagery, the sense of otherworldly menace or imminent apocalypse (even as the people appear to be fleeing away *from* the general threat) offers a striking parallel to the type of uncanny spectatorship experienced by many either in-person or on television early that Tuesday morning.

More than merely a passing reference, Simon's dream performs additional labor in pointing to one specific 9/11 episode in particular: the case of United Airlines Flight 93. One of four hijacked aircraft to alter its trajectory after departing Newark International, United 93, under the control of twenty-six-year-old pilot Ziad Jarrah, was prematurely downed over Shanksville, Pennsylvania thanks to an apparent on-board passenger rebellion. According to accounts from the passengers' relatives, moments before the plane headed south (toward what is imagined as the D.C. area), four of the bravest passengers, thirty-eight-year-old Tom Burnett (a former quarterback), thirty-two-year-old Todd Beamer, thirty-one-year-old Mark Bingham (a rugby player), and thirty-one-year-old Jeremy Glick (a US National Collegiate Judo champion), organized an impromptu rally toward the cockpit. To the media's delight, each of the so-termed

"heroes"—in particular Beamer and Glick—enjoyed instant fame thanks to radio, television, and magazine appearances of their wives and "distraught" young children. As *Today Show* host Matt Lauer sagely put it, here at last were America's new sweethearts.

The notable exception to such treatment was the childless figure of Mark Kendell Bingham, United 93's lone gay "hero" who selflessly sacrificed his life. A San Francisco resident and founder of a toted public relations firm known as the Bingham Group, the 6 foot-5 inch Berkeley grad was by most accounts a "model" U.S. citizen, save for his sexual proclivities. As Susan Faludi has explained, barely a day after the World Trade Center's implosion symbolically decimated the national spirit,[107] many in American society embraced a form of mythologized gender fantasy rooted in *heterosexist* displays of whimsy (of masculinity as dominant and keenly resurgent), nationalist pride, and "ecsta[tic]" proclamations of "murder" (Cunningham 220). All throughout this cultural fantasy, the two complimentary poles of masculinity and femininity became decidedly more rigid (if not markedly oppositional) as the former gender category, with designs of emotional resolve and physical comportment, soon formed the rubric for bestowing honor on the attacks' "true heroes," while the latter, in its accession to mid-century conservatism, paved the way for female subjects as "helpless" "virgins."[108]

On the surface, Mark Bingham, as a professional businessman and recognized athlete (Mark was co-founder of the San Francisco Fog, a gay men's rugby team recently indoctrinated into the Northern California Rugby Football Union), was essentially the poster child for a young, upwardly-mobile American lifestyle in the mold of Horatio

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[107] Faludi, Susan. The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007.

[108] Faludi, Susan. The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007: 65, 95; Fishman, Steve. "The Dead Wives Club, or Char in Love," *New York* Stories. Eds. Steve Fishman, John Homans, and Adam Moss. New York: Random House, 2008: 346-366.

Alger or Stephen Crane. In fact, like so many other memorable characters such as Alger's Luke Walton or Ben the Luggage Boy, Bingham's journey toward middle-class prominence was fraught with equal parts failure, equal parts sacrifice in what was, by most accounts, exemplary behavior. But while such impressive personal achievements ostensibly warranted the national media's attention, to the powers that be, Bingham's heroic performance strictly vacillated between two key pillars of masculine identity: his physical presence (i.e. ability to tower over terrorists) and devotion to an "American way of life," which figures such as Glick, Beamer, or Burnett soundly embraced in their status as heteronormative gender subjects. Juxtaposed alongside such exemplary figures, Bingham's sexual orientation was conveniently ignored (or in some cases dismissed) by a homophobic media committed to a culture of gender myths and depiction of the nation as (re)productive.

Being excluded from public discourse is hardly unusual for many within the queer community. But given the dramatic circumstances under which Bingham so selflessly gave his life, it seems somewhat surprising that the national media's treatment of his actions should appear, on the one hand, an obvious concession to reproductive politics as such, and on the other, a blatantly myopic act of prejudice not lost on outspoken queer minorities. Bingham's simultaneous presence and absence in the public spotlight (whether on televised broadcasts such as *CBS Evening News*, *Good Morning America*, *Larry King Live*, or *The O'Reilly Factor*), offered further validation of post-9/11 America's turn toward a more conservative or "desirable" social order (conservative

insofar as the nation worked "to *affirm* a certain structure, to *authenticate* social order") which implicitly acknowledged but never recognized the Queer.[109]

In the case of Mark Bingham, the Cold War-era politics surrounding 9/11 ceded only an *externally defined masculinity* in concert with a history of bravery, assertiveness, and natural leadership as recalled by the victim's loving mother.[110] And although a brief description in the September 12, 2001 *Washington Post* would politely reference Bingham's sexuality by finding room to compliment him on his "struggle[s]" as an openly gay male,[111] Bingham remained largely overlooked within society until his surprise coronation as *The Advocate*'s Person of the Year for 2001.[112] To be fair, some of Bingham's friends, including ex-fraternity brother David Kupiecki, expressed strong reservation over the attention given a man who long preferred the shadows to the spotlight. "When I saw that the most prominent gay and lesbian magazine [in America] had named my friend 'Person of the Year,' I thought Mark would take this 2 ways: 1) He would find it quite amusing. 2) He would feel a little uncomfortable," wrote Kupiecki on the *Advocate*'s website. Bingham, he maintained, was "not the Gay Hero" or icon as some in the community might have believed. Rather he was "an American hero *who happen[ed] to be gay*" and considered his sexual orientation a "private…aspect of his life."[113]

Jon Barrett's feature article in *The Advocate* was a tasteful and affective exposé on gay heroicism. Rather than mining Bingham's proclivities as a sexually active and

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[109] Edelman, Lee. No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004: 3.
[110] Alice Hoagland interview with Jon Barrett. *The Advocate* 9 May 2006: 42.
[111] Gillis, Justin. "Mark Bingham." *The Washington Post*. 13 Sept. 2001: A9.
[112] Barrett, John. "This is Mark Bingham." *The Advocate* 22 Jan 2002: 41-47.
[113] Kupiecki, David. "The Real Mark Bingham." *advocate.com*. Regent Media, 22 Jan. 2002. (Emphasis added.)

aggressive gay male (his nickname *was* "Bear Trap" after all), Barrett's article helped develop a balanced, often nuanced portrait of a man who transferred his so-called "non-procreative" sexual energies into a mélange of responsible endeavors. Even within a magazine as radically unique or "alternative" as *The Advocate*, here was a story which ascribed to the politics of *inclusion* and to the life and friendships of a generous individual.[114] Intoned Arizona senator John McCain: "I never knew Mark Bingham. But I wish I had. I know he was a good son and friend, a good rugby player, a good American, and an extraordinary human being."[115]

Suffice it to say, cultural nostalgia for fallen "son[s]" and "good American[s]" was pervasive throughout modern society. In addition, the social reification of masculinity in terms of a homogenous and clearly heteronormative nationalist identity brought the politics of inclusion (and by extension, *ex*clusion) to bear upon a nation still prone to xenophobia. Michael Cunningham's interest in such issues, dating as far back as *A Home at the End of the World* (1990) and *Flesh and Blood* (1995), has often been suffused with the promise of personal redemption that circumvents such thinking and provides a window of assimilation for many of his characters to enter. In *Specimen Days*, such utopic possibility is dramatically subsumed by anxieties of community, insularity, and the unknown future following on the heels of Catareen's death. Indeed, as Cunningham himself would concede in a recent interview, his fifth and most ambitious novel to date was simultaneously an homage to "low-brow" literature (for which ghost stories, thrillers, and science fiction were key components), as well as a public and deeply heart-felt attempt at suturing the anxieties of post-9/11 America with a far more

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[114] Barrett, Jon. "This is Mark Bingham." *The Advocate 22* Jan. 2002: 41-47.
[115] McCain's comments are part of his eulogy at Mark Bingham's funeral.

individuated sense of private disrepair, a stance made all the more valuable in light of Reverend Jerry Falwell's now-notorious public claim that the pagans, abortionists, gays, and lesbians all "helped" to incite the attacks.[116],[117]

At the end of the novel, after previously informing Emory Lowell of his intentions to forgo the group's journey altogether, the cyborg hero, upon awaking to find Catareen dead and death itself an uncomfortable bedfellow, changes his mind and vainly attempts to catch up with his émigré companions:

> He ran from the room, down the stairs, and outside. He knew. Of course he knew. Still, he shouted, 'Wait.'
>
> The ship was one hundred feet or more above the ground, quivering as its reactor prepared to deliver the blast. It floated, humming. Its three spider legs had been retracted. It was a perfect silver platter, trembling as if it might flip over, girdled with green-gold porthole lights. Centered in its underside was the circle of the reactor, deepening from blinding white to volcanic red. Ten, nine, eight…
>
> Simon ran to the empty place where the ship had been. He shouted, 'Wait, please, wait.' He stood shouting in the middle of the scorched circle the ship had left behind. He knew it was too late. Even if they could see him (they could not see him), there was no way to bring the ship down again, no rope or ladder to unfurl.
>
> 'No,' he shouted. 'Please, oh, please, wait for me.'

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[116] Lautman, Victoria. "Interview with Michael Cunningham." *victorialautman.com.* Victoria Lautman Productions, 12 June 2005.
[117] Falwell, Jerry. "Remarks during telecast of 700 Club." *actupny.org*. ActUp New York, n.d.

> The reactor fired. Simon was consumed by red light, obliterated by it. He was momentarily made only of light, blinded, shouting. It was not hot; it was only bright. The reactor made a small sound, a mechanical cough, and then the ship hurtled upward so fast it seemed to vanish entirely. By the time the red light had dissipated, by the time Simon's sight was restored, it was already impossible to tell which light was the ship and which was one of the nearer stars. (Cunningham 303)

Lowell's desire to colonize a new planet posits the ascending metal spacecraft as both symbolic of reproductive futurity and a vehicle for heteronormative ideology. More importantly, the heavily eroticized description of the craft—imagined as "quivering," "trembling," and "prepar[ing] to blast"—accesses a parallel vocabulary of sexual intimacy from which Simon, as cyborg, is excluded. Ultimately, what such pronounced exclusivity tragically provides is an allegory for the kind of media oversight which all but "obliterated" the post-9/11 queer and sent the family-friendly rubric of reproductive futurity to new heights of social exaltation. When we consider, in short, how the circular shadow entered by Simon (created, of course, by the blast from the heated reactor), mirrors the circular lens of a television camera that "consume[s]" and even "blind[s]" the male subject, it is possible to imagine how an angered or perhaps merely observant gay author might have chosen to critique such homophobic praxis in his text. Indeed, just as a man like Mark Bingham struggled to maintain a public level of laudatory praise or heroicism, so for Cunningham's queer protagonist, the inability to be *seen* by other subjects, let alone see *through* such ubiquitous fantasy, offers a figurative termination

amidst an ecstatic, gender-based "terror dream" (to borrow once again from Faludi) which all but reconfigured the domesticated landscape.

In the final analysis, with the residual effects of Falwell's *j'accuse* still alive in the public consciousness, *Specimen Days* takes the unprecedented step of acknowledging the supposed "criminality" of post-9/11 queerness while also providing a space for imaginary closure.[118] Early in the novel, Simon is imagined as a surface of monstrosity and nexus of implied social menace. Soon thereafter, he is revealed as a pathetic and ultimately affective subject whose cries for inclusion—if not social recognition—suggest a fundamental lack or innate vulnerability. Up until 9/11, much of the literature surrounding queer identity has focused on the rampant vulnerability enacted by AIDS as both a beginning and end to social identity (see for example Dale Peck's *Martin and John*, Sarah Shulman's *Rat Bohemia*, or Andrew Holleran's *Ground Zero*). In *Specimen Days*, however, Cunningham concludes by calling for a new and thus far unchartered direction in queer studies by examining modern American life outside the shadow of AIDS and instead within the realm of 9/11. What this suggests, in turn, is that the current field of academic prose, not to mention gay and lesbian popular culture, has essentially become outdated in its adherence to a twentieth-century trauma now viewed as secondary or temporally removed.

Earlier in the text, Simon complains of an insistent "lack" preventing him from feeling whole "around the edges" (232). And while Cunningham fails to sufficiently develop this point further, one might be inclined to treat the novella as an attempt at addressing the "lack" of a queer *community* after 9/11 within whose confines the impact of the attacks and their arrival might be discussed with sufficient help or formal

[118] Faludi, Susan. The Terror Dream. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007: 22.

earnestness. If the expansive reach of media, following Jean Baudrillard, has succeeded in transforming the individual subject into "a terminal of multiple networks,"[119] than the continued abatement of queer identity by forces seeking to enact a heterotopic community of traumatized peers makes the novel's final scene of bleakness—of Simon heading west "until he was no one and nothing but a man on a horse in a vast emptiness…of grass and sky"—all the more expressive of Cunningham's imagined post-AIDS, post-9/11 queer identity: one of solitude, sadness, and continued social disavowal (305).

[119] Baudrillard, Jean. The Ecstasy of Communication. Paris: Semiotext(e), 1987.

4

Global Specter, Global Trauma:
Male Subjectivity and the Horror Film

This final chapter is an attempt to map the crisis of post-9/11 masculinity in the realm of contemporary Hollywood. More precisely, *Global Specter, Global Trauma* shall examine post-9/11 horror films as examples of astute and timely "national cinema" speaking to and of social disaster. As a structuring mechanism, I plan to engage two of horror criticism's most influential modern voices: Carol J. Clover, whose seminal text *Men, Women, and Chainsaws* (1992) is considered the progenitor of genre-specific studies of gender; and Adam Lowenstein, a somewhat less-familiar name to readers, whose debut monograph *Shocking Representation* (2005) has proven invaluable in connecting horror to historical trauma.[120] My aim is to assimilate and extend both critics' work by focusing on male subjectivity and nationalist allegory in horror of the new-millennium; an act which, in keeping with this project's overall conceit—that of a

[120] Since its publication, Clover's study has gone on to become a canonical text for many film scholars interested in on-screen female exploitation. *Men, Women and Chainsaws* has been linked to various other analyses of genre (musicals, comedies, melodramas, westerns) as proposed by such notable scholarly voices as Brett Farmer, Lee Clark Mitchell, Gaylyn Studlar, and Mary Ann Doane. Lowenstein, in the meantime, has also been influential in helping to open up the field of horror film studies by moving away from gender and psychoanalysis as primary methodologies and toward the realm of history and nationalism. Emerging voices such as Michele Aaron, C.R. Warner, and Ernest Mathijs have all utilized Lowenstein's work in a number of fascinating contexts.

gender-specific fantasy of invasion—reveals a culture-wide mirroring of post-9/11 media narratives depicting U.S. masculinity under duress.

Horror, History, Allegory

In *Shocking Representation*, Lowenstein introduces the "allegorical moment" as a point of critical entry in the horror film. Defined as a "shocking collision of film, spectator, and history where registers of bodily space and historical time are disrupted, confronted, and intertwined," this aesthetic evocation, crafted by oral and/or visual montage, helps circumvent the theoretical impasse that film studies and trauma studies have each encountered when it comes to representing trauma and its assault upon reality (2). Trauma, we may recall, is imagined as a "wound" or rupture of the mind that returns uncontrollably to haunt the victim. According to Freud, trauma's arrival in a given subject is seen as an invisible, indeed largely nondescript "possession" during which the painful repetition of a certain ordeal is seen as a necessary step toward effective "working-through." Cathy Caruth, in her turn, has taken Freud's position further by proposing the innate presence of a "sorrowful *voice*…that cries out, [and] is paradoxically released *through the wound.*"[121]

At the heart of this crisis is a debate over lucid representation. On the one hand lie the seminal arguments of critics such as Dominick LaCapra and Hayden White who consider modernist mourning an idealized mode in which to convey formal closure.[122] By

[121] Caruth, Cathy. Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996: 2-3.
[122] See for example: LaCapra, Dominick. "Trauma, Absence, Loss." *Critical Inquiry* 25.4 (Summer 1999): 696-727. Or White, Hayden, "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth." In Probing the Limits of

contrast, the realist school of thought—which is to say, an approach resistant to allegorical expression—considers trauma as *unrepresentable* and therefore beyond the range of any "middle voice" (White 52). For Lowenstein, the allegorical moment subscribes "to neither the naïve verisimilitude of realism, nor to the self-conscious distantiation of modernism" in its ability to shock or sting the filmic viewer. Rather, it manifests itself as a rebuttal of the very categorical binarization so envisioned by trauma theory as absolute. "'Allegory,'" he writes, "is derived from the Greek *allos* ('other') and *–agorein* ('to speak publicly'), and this allegorical moment . . . 'speaks otherwise' by inviting us to unite shocking cinematic representation with the need to shock the very concept of representation in regard to historical trauma" (4). In short, the allegorical moment, like Roland Barthes' *punctum*, has the ability to transcend simple narrative (27).[123]

For critics such as E. Ann Kaplan and Ben Wang, cinema and trauma share a unique relationship when it comes to representations of horror.[124] For Kaplan, the cinema's ability to bear witness to an event—that is, its "linguistic" capacity to capture an image more concretely then, say, a work of literature or static art—circumvents both the formalized strategies "containing" a given trauma and various exigencies surrounding it. Unlike conventional novels or displays of "realist"—because affective—photography, the modern day cinema creates an "unusual, anti-*narrative* process of…narration" in which the use of sound, light, motion, and effects invites "the viewer to at once be there

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Representation: Nazism and the 'Final Solution.' Ed. Saul Friedlander. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992: 37-52.

[123] Barthes, Roland. Camera Lucida. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.

[124] Kaplan, E. Ann and Ben Wang, eds. Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009.

emotionally" with the characters, "[while] also cognitive[ly] distan[t] and aware" (Kaplan 10).

The allegorical moment speaks precisely to such conditions by offering, on the one hand, an instantiation of André Bazin's major ideological conceits—that of cinema as "unburdened" by illusion—while also implicitly accessing Kaplan's theory of "anti-narrative" art as a means of unexpected excitation.[125] In order to further extrapolate the nuances of such thought, let us consider the following sequence from Bob Clark's Vietnam-era horror film *Deathdream* (1972). In this scene, the mangled, undead body of a U.S. soldier named Andy Brooks staggers desperately back to his opened grave with both the police and his mother in tow. In addition to the wailing police sirens and crescendoing musical score, the pacing of the over-the-shoulder camerawork, along with cut-ins, close ups, and the occasional point-of-view offers a striking degree of intimacy hitherto missing from the film's plodding opening. A flesh-eating zombie who returns from the war still shell shocked but ostensibly "alive," Brooks is now viewed as a homegrown terrorist as opposed to domestic hero. In the scene's closing-shot, Christine Brooks, Andy's devoted mother reluctantly assists her flailing child back into the grave by scooping fresh-turned earth upon his flesh. As irate police officers close in around them, Andy's desiccated hand reaches out for his mother in one last glimpse of filial affection. In the distance, an abandoned sedan lights the night in orangish flame.

Seeking to address his opening query of what exactly cinematic horror has to tell us about "the horrors of history," Lowenstein submits that the scene's most poignant image—of Andy's outstretched hand reaching for his mother—instantly "clos[es] the

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[125] Bazin, Andrè. "The Myth of Total Cinema." What is Cinema? Volume 1. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967: 21.

[gap] between this death in the cemetery and the death in Vietnam" that Brooks, as a soldier, first experienced (2). The aural diegesis supporting this scene works to resituate the rural landscape into something foreign yet familiar to the audience: the dark, largely formidable Asian jungle where many a young American lost his life. For both the anguished mother and spectator, Jack MacGowan's expertly-hewn camerawork helps to further engage the viewer by bringing the trauma of Vietnam back to America within a sequence of filmic intensity. Indeed, to have the figure of a mother—herself deeply emblematic of a nation of mourning subjects—paradoxically *relive* her dead son's demise *first-hand*, suggests that this so-termed "process of embodiment" has succeeded in lending a voice to an otherwise unspeakable event here defined as preternatural and unworldly. Put differently, the allegorical moment, insofar as it forms a "productive tension" between the "unknowing" witness and "knowing" camera, holds as largely axiomatic the belief that through (ambiguous, distasteful, shocking) representation, trauma as such "can be communicated"—a claim that masterfully conflates Bazin's call for filmic verisimilitude with Kaplan's insistence on affective relevance (5).

Such acute cultural trauma is of course not exclusive to Vietnam. And in fact, as Lowenstein himself readily attests, any number of seminal traumas—among them, the Holocaust, Algerian War, Hiroshima, and Kent State—act as implicit cultural backdrops to a host of horror titles offering multiple "allegorical collision[s]" (172): *Eyes Without A Face* (George Franju, 1960), *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960), *Onibaba* (Shindo Kaneto, 1964), *The Virgin Spring* (Ingmar Bergman, 1960), and *Last House on the Left* (Wes Craven, 1972). Where one senses actual value in such thinking is in the allegorical moment's modern application to the "now" of September 11—which is to say, a point in

time when contemporary America "periodicize[d]" the attacks as both the beginning (and end) of an era.[126] Alongside the spate of dramas promoting the valor of "national cinema,"[127] the horror film genre, for so long attached to cries of cheerless irreverence, has been surprisingly active in engaging with current events and their impact on popular culture. As we shall see, horror after 9/11 took a significant turn toward more explicit—and perhaps pornographic—scenes of violence indicative of a new political consciousness. Gone were filmic narratives of fabulous entities haunting American subjects (extraterrestrials, satanic demons, beasts from the ocean floor). In their stead, films such as *Saw*, *Hostel*, and the Australian hit *Wolf Creek* employed the on-screen torture of American bodies as a way of acknowledging the genre's new social purpose. Emboldened, one assumes, by an industry-wide wave of patriotism, many horror titles accessed the immediacy of 9/11 by making viscerally repulsed audiences *emotionally* beholden to scenes of extraordinary violence. (E. Ann Kaplan, one assumes, would be proud.)

Of particular note was the growing visibility of white male bodies as loci of invasion or assault—a phenomenon that not only shattered the genre rubric of women as victims and men as their monstrous predators, but also opened up ground for critical analyses of post-9/11 masculinity. Beginning with a call to recognize contemporary horror's "Final Boy," this essay shall mold both the allegorical moment with modern-day gender studies and offer an assessment of U.S. masculinity in crisis.

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[126] See for example Michiko Kakutani, "The Age of Irony Isn't Over After All," New York Times, October 9, 2001: E1, E5.

[127] See for example, Oliver Stone's *World Trade Center* (2006), Paul Greengrass's *United 93* (2006), or Jim Simpson's *The Guys* (2002).

Last Man Standing

In his conclusion, Lowenstein offers some preliminary thoughts on the allegorical moment's relevance to September 11. Cognizant of public desire to brand the attacks as a part of "history," Lowenstein submits that alongside the various photographic, relic, and structural exhibitions perceived as commemorating or immortalizing the attacks, a recent spate of war films—many of them set in World War II—offered contemporary audiences timely displays of invigorating, if hysterical, U.S. nationalism. For Lowenstein, films such as Randall Wallace's *We Were Soldiers* (2002) and John Woo's *Windtalkers* (2002) dutifully portrayed Americans assailed by forces deemed outside of or opposed to democracy—forces whose anti-American sentiments offered a fitting allegorical backdrop to the present-day War on Terror. Coinciding with President Bush's rhetoric of fighting for the "safety" and "freedom" of millions, *Soldiers* and *Windtalkers*, despite temporal distance, acted as platforms for pro-war propaganda, resulting, as Lowenstein observes, in a warm reception from both critics and audiences alike.

War films, undoubtedly, are a compelling medium for trauma's aesthetic invocation. In their distinctive veneer (of foreign locales and ominous skies), these affective narratives typically invoke feelings of fear and excitement within an audience. Thanks to hand-held cameras and pro-filmic editing, the hiss of errant gunfire or roar of explosions makes the spectacle of battle all the more encompassing, if not shocking and disorienting to the spectator. Such immediate experience, while affording the fantasy of vicarious comradery, also invites room for allegorical collision within the action of the past entering the present. In a film such as *We Were Soldiers*, for example, the body of a Japanese-American private named Jimmy Nakayama (Brian Tee) is horribly burned by exposure to napalm. Acting on instinct, one of Nakayama's companions, a battlefront

reporter named Joe Galloway (Barry Pepper), stops to help his injured friend by grabbing the man's legs and pulling him away to safety. Unfortunately, Galloway's grasp on Nakayama results in the visceral tearing of the soldier's flesh, yielding a massive hemorrhaging and round of convulsions auguring the flailing private's death.

For Lowenstein, following Walter Benjamin, Nakayama's gruesome demise accesses a "moment of danger" in the text which "flashes up" before the viewer's eyes and "threatens both the content of the tradition and those who inherit it" by rewriting or redeeming the traumatic past.[128] History, wrote Benjamin, is established by two seemingly incongruous methodologies of engagement: the force of historical materialism and force of conventional historicism. Conventional historicism is defined as the scholarly engagement with the past in terms of an arbitrary timeline or "secret index" assigning specific designations to an era (the Classical Era, Hellenistic Age, etc.) (390). Historical materialism, conversely, is a view of history as a social "continuum" or spectrum whose overlapping sections, whereas once viewed as discrete, now offer room for dialectical exploration (390). As Benjamin writes:

> History is the subject of a construction whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled full by now-time [*Jetztzeit*]. Thus, to Robespierre, ancient Rome was a past charged with now-time, a past which he blasted out of the continuum of history. The French Revolution viewed itself as Rome reincarnate. It cited ancient Rome exactly the way fashion cites a by-gone mode of dress. Fashion has a nose for the topical,

[128] Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings: Volume 4: 1938-1940. Michael W. Jennings, Ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003: 389-400.

> no matter where it stirs in the thickets of long ago; it is the tiger's leap into the past. (395)

In Lowenstein's eyes, Jimmy Nakayama's painful death spectacularly "blast[s] open" the continuum of history by mapping the eruptive imagery of Hiroshima onto a Japanese-American similarly burned by the atrocities of war. As a Japanese subject, Nakayama's mutilated body instantly conjoins the mutilated ghosts of 1945 with that of American soldiers, some twenty years later, in the din and heat of Vietnam. More importantly, such a compelling instance of *Jetztzeit* also affords Lowenstein an additional correlation to the "now" of 9/11—a "now," that is, which bleeds back through time (and the lens of filmic space) to rest within Nakayama's prostrate form: "The film solidifies," writes Lowenstein, "rather than interrogates, one of the most troubling aspects of public discourse surrounding 9/11—its apparent parallels to World War II, and particularly to Pearl Harbor. Consider, for example, the powerful juxtaposition of two formally similar images widely circulated in the wake of 9/11: the American flag at Iwo Jima in 1945 and at the World Trade Center's 'Ground Zero' in 2001. Both images are drawn from iconic historical photographs that convey the undeniably moving courage of the soldiers and firefighters depicted within them" (180). Thanks to its explicit nationalist overtures, *We Were Soldiers* succeeds in pulling the past back into the present and lending a voice to 9/11's sudden trauma. Nakayama's screams, after all, echo the cries for help that arose from Ground Zero, as well as in Washington and Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Simultaneously, the film also offers an example of how contemporary Hollywood

responded to the attacks by promoting a formal gender fantasy of disaster: namely, of American masculinity both hindered and overwhelmed.

To be sure, Lowenstein's reading of *We Were Soldiers* is a compelling instance of 9/11's allegorical arrival in cinema. As an American soldier, Nakayama's horrendous end strikes close to home for those who witnessed 9/11's tragic unfolding. But what such an analysis fails to consider is a link between the genre of World War II combat films and that of traditional horror. How, one could ask, does 9/11's allegorical moment apply to the horror genre? Are there any new-millennial horror titles explicitly referencing and/or invoking the attacks? In order to answer these questions, one must first turn to work by critic Michael Hammond and his study of horror and combat films. In "Some Smothering Dreams," Hammond submits that the often overwhelming array of images evinced throughout war or combat film narratives manages to conflate the "horror" of war with the "horror" of aesthetic realism via intimate, often first-person camerawork.[129] This in turn, because it summarily accedes to what Constance Balides imagines as a powerful "cinema of immersion," results in a complex assemblage of dexterous "framing strategies" that conspire to pull the spectator deep inside the diegesis.[130] Given such commitment, combat film cinema might be said to mimic the function and technique of modern horror in its embrace of spectacle, specularity, and a New Hollywood-style of "engulfment."[131] Like the off-screen rustling of bushes, then, or first-person "I" camera that lets us see *through* but never *at* the filmic monster, the combat film narrative

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[129] Hammond, Michael. "Some Smothering Dreams: The Combat Film in Contemporary Hollywood." Genre and Contemporary Hollywood. Ed. Steve Neale. London: British Film Institute Publishing, 2002: 62-76.
[130] Balides, Constance. "Jurassic Post-Fordism: Tall Tales of Economics in the Theme Park." *Screen* 41.2 (Summer 2000): 153.
[131] Elsaesser, Thomas. "Specularity and engulfment: Francis Ford Coppola and Bram Stoker's Dracula." Contemporary Hollywood Cinema. Eds. Steve Neale and Murray Smith. London and New York: Routledge, 2000: 191-208.

typically builds suspense by either denying the viewer a shot of the enemy (and thus placing us in cahoots with the soldiers themselves) or framing the heroes as proverbial targets while viewed through some unseen crosshairs. Within such a limited and ostensibly "partial" filmic perspective, control is envisioned as central to the overall narrative flow, becoming part of an ideal spectatorial experience for which the director (as auteur) is responsible.

Horror films pivot upon a similar praxis in order to build fear within the viewer. Thanks mainly to the genius of genre visionaries Alfred Hitchcock, George Romero, and Roman Polanski, horror's modern age of expression, announced with the 1960 arrival of *Psycho* and *Peeping Tom* (dir. Michael Powell), utilized a parallel narrative of control and mastery to distinguish between victims and villains, participant and spectator, power*ful* and power*less* individuals. By the late 1960s, as historian Harry Benshoff has explained, the signifying "monster" "[underwent] a radical [political] shift, splitting into at least two opposing constructs—a traditional one which continued to posit the monster as a threat to the moral order of society, and another which saw the monster becoming increasingly domesticated," if not sexualized and overwhelmingly male.[132] Not coincidentally, the increased visibility of New Left minorities put the weight of perceived co-optation on the shoulders of a white, male-identified subjectivity viewed as woefully disaffected in society. Observed Carol J. Clover: throughout horror of the 60s and 70s, masculinity itself was now collectively "worr[ied]" (65).

For all its myriad incarnations as stage-set noir (*House of Wax*), supernatural gothic (*The Wolf Man*, *Dracula*), or space-age hybrid horror (*Alien, The Black Hole*), the

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[132] Benshoff, Harry M. Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997: 173.

horror genre's most pronounced—and for some, excessively *overbearing*—categorical offering remains the critically disavowed "slasher" film and its embrace of grindhouse aesthetics.[133] Clover, in her turn, describes this particular horror subgenre as belonging "at the bottom of the [Hollywood] horror heap" and "immensely generative" in its predictable, because formulaic, narrative structure (21). With such seminal titles as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974), *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978), *Friday the 13th* (Sean S. Cunningham, 1980), and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Wes Craven, 1984) by now iconic within the public consciousness, slasher films may be said to revolve around the story of a deranged "psycho killer who slashes to death a string of mostly female victims, one by one, until he is subdued or killed, usually by the one girl who has survived [his assault]" (Clover 21).

Gender, for Clover, is at the core of the slasher narrative. And within this particular subgenre, women are "at desperate odds" with the designs of their patriarchal counterparts and objectified, however explicitly, before the camera (22). In films such as *Slumber Party Massacre* (Amy Holden Jones, 1982) or *Dressed to Kill* (Brian De Palma, 1980), female characters bear the brunt of chauvinistic jokes and/or physical abuse which positions femininity as a vulnerable construct lacking the ability to "look."[134] The exception to such a rule is the "intelligent, watchful, levelheaded" figure of the Final Girl, a biologically female entity whose desire to seek out, confront, and destroy the monster, "reconstitutes" her identity as masculine (Clover 44, 50). Unlike the rest of her female

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[133] For a compelling analysis of grindhouse cinema and modern horror, see Morris Dickstein's essay on "The Aesthetics of Flight." Dickstein, Morris. "The Aesthetics of Fright." Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film. Barry Keith Grant, Ed. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1984: 34.

[134] See Williams, Linda. "When the Woman Looks." *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*, Eds. Doane, Mellencamp and Williams. Washington D.C.: American Film Institute Monograph Series, 1983: 83-99.

colleagues, the Final Girl effectively troubles gender construction by being sexually *un*available, mechanically dexterous, resourceful, courageous, and aggressive (40). More intriguingly, she is also formally recognized as an androgynous subject, sporting names such as Stevie (*The Fog*), Marti (*Hell Night*), Sidney (*Scream*), or Stretch (*Texas Chain Saw Massacre II*) to signify a site of deep transgression. As Clover notes, in her remarkable ability to "scream, stagger, fall, rise, and scream again," the Final Girl succeeds in shattering a number of gender stereotypes that not only affords her person *on-screen* agency, but *off-screen* feminist influence as well (35).

By the mid-1990s, the Final Girl's presence was all but a genre cliché. In the footsteps of *Nightmare*'s Nancy Thompson or *Halloween*'s Laurie Strode, memorable characters such as *Silence of the Lambs*' Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster) or *Scream*'s Sidney Prescott suggested the long-term longevity of female protagonists in horror of the late millennium. Quite unexpectedly, however, such formulaic structure was soon reversed by the arrival of men; or more precisely, the arrival of a lone male protagonist who unseats the Final Girl as an agent of change and revenge. As the last man standing, this particular character, or "Final Boy," is, like his female predecessors, a conflicted body who remains emotionally and corporeally aloof. Compared to the chainsaw-wielding surgeon in *Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2005) or eponymous villain of Stephen Kay's *Boogeyman* (2005), characters such as Paxton (Jay Hernandez) and Tim Jensen (Barry Watson) are isolated men always already haunted by instances of gender insufficiency. In *Boogeyman*, for example, Tim Jenson's masculine comportment is directly challenged by a lifelong fear of closets and psychic intimacy. For Tim, the childhood trauma of his mother's death (at the hands of a mythical beast called the Boogeyman) begets a near-

hermetic adult existence and emotional paralysis reflective of his loss of phallic mastery. Rather than accepting the truth of his mother's death, Tim's melancholic state bespeaks a general "stiff[ening]" of the body so evinced within Freud's theory of the Medusa.[135]

In "The Medusa's Head," Freud proposed that the male child's glimpse of his mother's genitalia played out in the infantile mind as an act of castration and "monstrous" femininity. Adapting his thinking to the Medusa's affinity for turning subjects into stone, Freud proposed that the male child's response to his mother's flesh—of becoming "hard" or sexually aroused—was both a defensive reaction to her lack of a penis and display of budding sexual awareness. "To display the penis," wrote Freud, "(or any of its surrogates) is to say: 'I am not afraid of you. I defy you. I have a penis.' Here, then, is another way of intimidating the Evil Spirit [more commonly known as woman]" (203). In *Boogeyman*, the Final Boy's paralysis results not in the comforting reminder of phallic potency, but horror of signifying lack. In a word, Jensen is both a *feminized* body incapable of action, and figure of emotional *temerity*. He has failed, in other words, to assume his gender privilege and avoid being viewed apart from men.

I must, at this point, briefly qualify my use of "boy" given its present application to adult men. Unlike their teenage counterparts, who struggle to be recognized in society as adults, the vast majority of Final Boys are twenty-something or older with established lives, personal histories, and allegiances. Though *physically* mature, each of these men are *emotionally* hindered by unresolved fantasies of failure—fantasies not unlike those envisioned by Clover as intrinsic to many Final Girls (28-64). In making this claim, I want to suggest that Final Boys exist as solitary bachelors or traumatized veterans forced

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[135] Freud, Sigmund. "Medusa's Head." 1922. Rpt. in Sexuality and the Psychology of Love. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963: 202.

to the margins of society, appearing in films such *In the Mouth of Madness* (John Carpenter, 1995), *Lord of Illusions* (Clive Barker, 1995), *From Dusk till Dawn* (Quentin Tarantino, 1996), *Event Horizon* (Paul Anderson, 1997), *28 Days Later* (Danny Boyle, 2002), *Darkness Falls* (Jonathan Liebesman, 2003), *Wrong Turn* (Rob Schmidt, 2003), *Jeepers Creepers 2* (Victor Salva, 2003), *Suspect Zero* (E. Elias Merhige, 2004), *Constantine* (Francis Lawrence, 2005), *Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2005), and Alexandre Aja's remake of *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006).

Each film debuted in a political climate rife with social intrigue. In August 1990, for example, then-Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's now-infamous interaction with a young U.S. hostage named Stuart Lockwood proved the final straw in a series of provocative actions pushing America ever closer to open war. Within an agitated nation, the portrayal of Hussein as despot or renegade maverick verged precipitously upon the realm of homophobia. As Jonathan Goldberg has explained, in the midst of mass preparation for military action, the sale of nationalist paraphernalia—including a plain white t-shirt with the words "America Will Not Be Saddam-ized" accompanying an image of an American flag and solitary camel sporting Saddam Hussein's face on its rear—"equate[d] Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait with [an act of] rape, and implie[d] that all forced entries [were] acts of sodomy" (1).[136]

In so trading upon the currency of "militaristic *imaginaire*," American masculinity's construction in the 90s embraced a blue-collar ethos of rote xenophobia (Goldberg 2). "Real" masculinity was defined as white and "straight," leaving no room for accusations of effeminacy. Elsewhere in society, such populist fantasy continued to

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[136] Goldberg, Jonathan. Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992.

expand with Hollywood's use of patriotic narrative (*Forrest Gump*, *Schindler's List*, *Apollo 13*, *Saving Private Ryan, The Thin Red Line*). Horror, in the meantime, offered little in the way of politics. But it did take steps to examine masculinity and its engagement with militaristic trauma. Two films in particular, *Lord of Illusions* (1995) and *Event Horizon* (1997), used the onset of trauma as a psychical impasse for learning to act "like a man." In both narrative instances, the overwhelming guilt of survivorship plays a critical role in shattering each protagonist's sense of masculinity. Both Harry D'Amour (Scott Blakula) and Captain Miller (Laurence Fishburne) soon realize they could have easily "done more" to save their friends.

In horror, masculinity exists as less a manifest object than an *idea* or code of behavior. In its rudimentary form, manhood is defined as a hardened façade impervious to penetrative acts. In slasher films, such underlying conceits govern the behavior of characters like Jason Voorhees, Fred Krueger, Leatherface, and Michael Myers, as each functions in the text as an agent of aggression or wielder of phallic violence. By contrast, the Final Boy persists as a "softer" male body marked by pacifistic inclination. Subject to bouts of intense self-pity, he imagines himself an inadequate subject in the presence of more powerful men.

In the following section, I want to turn our attention to Alexandre Aja's remake of *The Hills Have Eyes* in order to consider how the Final Boy's presence in the text offers compelling insight into the state of contemporary masculinity. What I see as important about the film is its seminal status as a post-9/11 horror narrative concerned explicitly with white masculinity. Or more precisely, with a young, white, middle-class protagonist who sees his family and in-laws brutally butchered by a family of mutant cannibals. On

the surface, *The Hills Have Eyes* has little to do with gender or September 11. In truth, however, the film provides an illuminating take on the war in Afghanistan, contemporary politics, and American masculinity's fantastic collapse—a collapse, as we shall see, which not created a space for the marketing of fear, but also augured the ascension of contemporary horror as "legitimate," indeed progressive, national cinema.

Man on Fire

The plot of *The Hills Have Eyes* goes like this: on the occasion of their silver anniversary, "Big Bob" Carter and his wife Ethel embark on a cross-country trek from Cleveland to California with members of their immediate family. Accompanying the happy couple are eldest daughter Lynn, her husband Doug, their infant child Catherine, younger brother Bobby, teenage sister Brenda, and the family's two pet Alsatians, Beast and Beauty. Equipped with a well-stocked trailer and Bob's trusty (if aging) SUV, the Carters elect to tour the New Mexico desert in the spirit, as Bob puts it, of "adventure." Unfortunately, while stopping for gas at a local station, the family is counseled by an attendant to take a "short cut" off-map and through the foot hills of the mountains just ahead. In reality, the Carters have been sent to an abandoned nuclear testing site patrolled by a family of ravenous cannibals. Barely an hour into their trek, the Carter's progress is derailed by a chain of spikes concealed beneath the blowing desert sand. Their vehicle totaled, and with no sign of civilization in sight, the Carters become prey for Papa Jupiter's clan of dissident, mutated "freaks."

For Doug Bukowski, the decision to accompany his wife's family on their trip out west is nothing short of regrettable. Doug's father-in-law, a retired police chief, looks down upon Bukowski with regular disdain for the latter's seemingly effete or unmanly

constitution. As a physically svelte, largely supine young Democrat who loathes guns, physical violence, and manual labor, Doug humorously completes what, for Bob, is a fundamental lack in his son-in-law's status as a man. Equally as vexing is Doug's career as a cell phone salesman, an occupation envisioned by Bob as wholly impractical, if not insufficient for support one's family. At one point, even the audience is invited to share this position, as Doug, moments after the trailer careens to a halt, inexplicably dials 911 for assistance: "Hey Bukowski," barks Bob, "give the cell phone a rest!" A request that Doug would be hard-pressed to challenge.

In his profound emasculation, Bukowski provides a striking contrast to the structure of white heteronormative masculinity. Unlike Bob, who functions as both the alpha male and "driving" force of the Carter clan, Doug is seen as the inadequate omega idling behind in the trailer. Not insignificantly, shortly before the mutants' spikes violently hinder the Carters' trip, Doug is shown toiling in the trailer over a "broken" air conditioner for the better part of an hour and a half. Resigned to finishing the journey sans any reprieve from the desert heat, Doug is quietly humiliated when Bobby succeeds in fixing the unit in minutes. "There," he remarks matter-of-factly, "the thermostat [was just partly] disconnected." In his mechanical ineptitude and literal relegation to the rear, Doug is imagined as a castrated male absent any redeeming characteristics. By contrast, Bob, in his ability to lead his family, conveys a portrait of "model" masculinity.

Early *mise-en-scene* reaffirms Doug's status as a man apart from men. At one point, while Bob and the station attendant spend time beneath the SUV's hood, Doug sits alone toward the far right margin of the frame nursing his daughter in the shade [Figure 4.1]. Ensconced at the literal margins (and thus removed from his masculine peers), the

young cell phone salesman is inscribed along a passive, intrinsically feminized *telos* (the image of Whistler's *Mother* comes to mind) thanks to his decision to pump milk over gas. Bob, in the meantime, occupies the shot's immediate foreground, his burly physique both commanding our attention and demanding that characters such as Ethel and the attendant hover about him. Simply put, Bob represents everything that Doug is not: he is resourceful, powerful, confident, and decisive even in moments of duress. After all, when the tires on the truck are shredded, it is Bob, not Doug, who manages to minimize the damage and ensure the health of each agitated participant. Bukowski, we may recall, is but a prostrate spectator.

Yet even as Bob succeeds in protecting his family from immediate harm, his ostensive hegemony in the text is abruptly undone by the actions of an equally overbearing social patriarch. Papa Jupiter, we are told, was once an indigent mine worker who refused to flee from his home even when military personnel began performing nuclear tests on his property. Stubborn to a fault, Jupiter and his wife soon give birth to a host of mutated children who grew ever more hideous through the years. As Tony Williams explains, *Hills* is a tale of two warring families distinguished by social stratification. On the one side lie the Carters, residing in the purview of "proper" society. Bob, in his role as a blue-collar serviceman, is directly linked to a narrative of national performance and frivolous consumer expenditure. Jupiter, by contrast, occupies an abject realm, relying on thievery, bloodshed, selfishness, and cannibalism to persist as an un-American "Other." The irony, of course, is that Jupiter and his family are ultimately *victims* of federal policy who warrant more than mere audience reproach. When it first

Figure 4.1: *The Hills Have Eyes* (Alexandre Aja, 2006): Doug is consigned to the far right margins of the frame. (Courtesy of Fox Searchlight Pictures)

appeared in 1977, *Hills*'s nuclear-themed narrative held temporal relevance to the ongoing *détente* between America and Russia. The battery of military "shots" fired in the 1950s (the "Ivy Mike" in 1952, "Castle Bravo" in 1954, "Argus I" in 1958) left many in the country increasingly distrustful of both the safety and prudence of advanced technology. In the western United States, the use of a sixty-five mile stretch of land owned by the U.S. Department of Energy in Nye County, Nevada, drew repeated cries of foul from residents and local officials who complained of "downwind" (and incurable) nuclear fallout. According to Department of Energy officials, the Nevada Test Site, which hosted over 900 nuclear tests from 1951 to 1992, soon became an ominous tourist destination (albeit from the purview of nearby Las Vegas) thanks to the perpetual mushroom cloud dominating the horizon and seen from miles away.[137] In the eyes of nuclear historians Gerald H. Clarfield and William M. Wiecek, the most egregious revelation to arise from such experiments was the fact that, at its height, the American nuclear age arrived without medical experts having any formal knowledge of both the

[137] United States Nuclear Tests. July 1945 through September 1992. DOE/NV-209-REV 15 December 2000: xv.

immediate or long-term effects of radiation exposure. It was literally, as Clarfield and Wiecek ominously adduced, an instance of the blind leading the blind.[138]

According to the National Cancer Institute, between 1951 and 1963, above-ground testing of nuclear devices in the Nevada area released significant levels of radioactive iodine-131 into the surrounding atmosphere. From there, local residents, including those in Utah, New Mexico, Colorado, and Montana, developed instances of thyroid cancer, leukemia, and, in some extreme cases, generational birth defects through the ingestion of contaminated milk, meat, or dairy.[139]

To a politically conscious director like Craven, tales of pronounced radiation poisoning were fast becoming grounds for filmic discourse. Indeed, in addition to finding value in titles such as *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Robert Wise, 1951), *Invaders from Mars* (William Cameron Menzies, 1953), *Godzilla* (Ishiro Honda, 1954), *This Island Earth* (Joseph M. Newman, 1955), *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (Jack Arnold, 1957), *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* (Nathan Juran, 1958), *Dr. Strangelove* (Stanley Kubrick, 1964) or *Planet of the Apes* (Franklin J. Schaffner, 1968), the then-thirty-eight-year-old director voiced deep concern in the 1970s for an unwanted reprisal of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, or Bikini Atoll.[140] According to Tony Williams, *Hills*'s original 1977 release owed much of its atmospheric tension to the still-festering wounds of South Vietnam and the so-termed "dirty business" of war and defeat.[141],[142] America, he argued, had entered a

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[138] Clarfield, Gerard H. & William M. Wiececk. Nuclear America: Military and Civilian Nuclear Power in the United States, 1940-1980. New York: Harper & Row, 1984.
[139] "Radioactive I-131 from Fallout." *National Cancer Institute*. 1997. Web. 30 Dec. 2009.
[140] March 1, 1954 Castle Bravo incident in Bikini Atol, Marshall Islands.
[141] U.S. Army General Maxwell Taylor, one of the leading strategists of U.S. intervention, lamented in a speech shortly after American troop withdrawal that military leaders "didn't know [themselves]" and "knew [even] less about North Vietnam." "Who was Ho Chi Minh?" he exclaimed. "Nobody really knew. So, until we know the enemy and know our allies and know ourselves, we'd better keep out of this kind of

period of great instability as fears of physical inadequacy and bodily loss found their way into the mantle of masculinity. On the heels of American troop withdrawal from 1973 to 1975, the white male body—a body comparatively *unmarked* when juxtaposed against that of a foreign, yellow-hued Asian menace—soon found itself ensconced within literary, filmic, and cultural narratives commemorating the loss of thousands of "real" male subjects.

Seen from afar, *The Hills Have Eyes* would thus appear a timely piece of cinema which spoke to and for the tumultuous 1970s and process of grand "remasculinization."[143] But it is also perhaps an eerily relevant text when placed in the context of present day America—an America, that is, in which questions of national futurity and "nuclear" family politics hold additional political caché. When placed in the context of George W. Bush's war in Iraq and Afghanistan, Aja's remake of *Hills* provides a visual space for both the critical mapping of the Final Boy and platform for allegorical intervention. In the following scene, I want to return to the issue of Doug's liminality and discuss how the trauma that unfolds in the Carter's trailer not only acts to spur the hero's entrance into the symbolic, but also invokes an allegorical moment for U.S. audiences informed by present day events.

In the film, shortly after Bob determines that the SUV's axle has been damaged beyond repair, he and Doug set out along the desert road in search of unlikely human aid. Heading west, Doug soon discovers a crater of cars representing the remains of fellow roadside travelers; Bob, in the meantime, heading east toward the gas station, is promptly

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dirty business. It's very dangerous." Quote from Karnow, Stanley, Vietnam, A History, New York: Penguin, 1997: 23.

[142] Williams, Tony. Hearths of Darkness. Madison, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996.

[143] Jeffords, Susan. The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.

captured by Jupiter's eldest son Pluto. Hours later, Bukowski returns to the trailer bearing the fruits of his unsuccessful mission: a fishing rod, baseball bat, hammer, and gloves. As Bobby and Lynn proceed to mock such impractical booty, Ethel Carter expresses concern about her husband's whereabouts as the day has now swiftly turned to night. Suddenly, the group's happy reunion is rudely shattered by a high-pitched scream just outside. Racing from the trailer, the group is shocked to discover a prostrate Bob lit on fire and strapped to a Joshua tree. Nearly beside themselves with horror, the Carters frantically attempt to combat the flames and rescue their beloved patriarch, all the while unaware that, at that very moment, two of Jupiter's children have entered the trailer.

What ensues is perhaps the film's most notorious allegorical moment: teenage Brenda, for one, is awoken from her sleep and brutally raped by the mutant named Lizard; baby Catherine, in the meantime, is scooped up by Pluto in anticipation of the night's tasty supper. Ethel Carter, in the meantime, upon hearing her youngest child's screams, races back to the trailer only to be confronted by the muzzle of Lizard's (formerly Bob's) magnum handgun; seconds later, Ethel is left to die from a wound to the stomach. Lynn Carter, at this moment, also returns out of fear for her infant daughter's safety. Like Brenda, Lynn is forced to submit to Lizard's advances before suffering a shot to the head. Howling in triumph, the two mutant terrorists flee into the night with the wailing baby in tow. Doug and Bobby, having failed to rescue Bob, are left to assess the damage.

In certain ways, the deaths and mutilation of the Carter women represent what Lloyd B. Lewis has considered the mass vulnerability of American culture in the absence

of able-bodied men.[144] During the war, America was forced to recognize itself as a nation of women, children, misfits, and seniors incapable of policing themselves. Suffice it to say, even while enjoying success in the professional workplace, many such figures still found themselves plagued by threats from outside entities. As in the case of Craven's more notorious *Last House on the Left* (1972)—in which a nomadic band of convicts viciously assault, rape, and leave-for-dead two concert-bound teenage hippies—the "crisis at home" afflicting U.S. culture was, in shockingly visceral terms, both a stern condemnation of degenerate masculinity and lament for its missing moral compass.

The Hills Have Eyes adopts a similar take on gender, employing performative gestures as fundamental steps in the measure—or dispensation—of heroism. Doug Bukowski, in finding his sister-in-law raped, wife slaughtered, mother-in-law wounded, and daughter in the hands of cannibals, has had his own masculinity effectively *terminated* by a comparatively more "successful" male entity (Jupiter). For the moment, Doug's masculine constitution, already troubled by accusations of cowardice, finds itself removed from all normative modes of gender in what Carol J. Clover has considered a "rezon[ed]" or "reimagine[d]" subject position.[145]

Simultaneously, Doug's failure to protect his family also accesses the kind of rampant paranoia that conservative critics such as former White House drug czar William J. Bennett described in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. In *Why We Fight*, Bennett bemoaned how the act of being "caught with its defenses down" posited the American nation as a hapless construct vulnerable to future invasion: "Having [already] been softened up," he

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[144] Lewis, Lloyd B. The Tainted War: Culture and Identity in Vietnam War Narratives. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985.
[145] Clover, Carol. Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996: 107.

explained, "we might not be able to sustain collective momentum in what we [are] now being called upon to do" (168).[146] Such pessimistic outlook proved wildly popular in the attack's immediate fallout. For many Americans, the sheer audacity of the terrorists left even gregarious personalities unexpectedly at a loss for words: "It's terribly sad here in New York City," began David Letterman after a week-long hiatus. "We've lost five thousand fellow New Yorkers. And you can feel it. You can feel it. And you can see it. It's terribly sad. Terribly, terribly sad . . . ."[147] But even as Letterman's words spoke for many—if not all—Americans, within a matter of months, such aphasiac pronouncements were soon displaced by the rhetoric of violent revenge. In *The Weekly Standard*, columnist Fred Barnes described President Bush as "a man [on] a mission" to banish the "cowards" from the face of the Earth.[148] Concurrently, former Republican intellectual and *Wall Street Journal* columnist Peggy Noonan proposed that Mr. Bush "tear open his shirt and reveal the big 'S,'" seconds before crushing his opponents.[149] Such, as Susan Faludi has explained, was how America resurrected masculinity.[150]

In *The Hills Have Eyes* a similar gender fantasy unfolds, as the narrative's lone male hero, though perhaps not *physically* harmed, treats the shock of his family's trauma as akin to rape. Upon stumbling upon the trailer's bloody vista, Doug collapses before the camera, embraces his wife, and offers up a silent scream of agony. For the horrified audience, such affective display is at once immediately sobering. But even as we prepare to pity Doug's predicament, the question of his ability to overcome such adversity

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[146] Bennett, William J. Why We Fight: Moral Clarity and the War on Terrorism. New York: Random House, 2002.
[147] "Opening Monologue." *The Late Show With David Letterman*. CBS. WCBS, New York, 17 Sept. 2001. Television.
[148] Barnes, Fred. "Man With a Mission." *The Weekly Standard* 8 October 2001: 4.
[149] Noonan, Peggy. "The Right Man." *Wall Street Journal* 30 January 2003: 14.
[150] Faludi, Susan. The Terror Dream. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007

troubles—or rather tempers—our reaction. In his failure to uphold the aegis of patriarchal might, is Bukowski a man to be pitied at length? Or chastised for his clear gender failure? This, as Carol J. Clover has explained, is of central importance to slasher narratives (107).

In horror, writes Clover, gender is frequently deployed along lines of audience/spectatorial affect. Under the conventional genre rubric, the adolescent male or "majority viewer" (to invoke Tania Modleski's phrase[151]), is asked to first take pleasure in the Final Girl's assault before "crossing over" to partake in her revenge (107). Such, writes Clover, is what drives the popularity of titles such as *Friday the 13th* and *Halloween* amongst a boisterous adolescent male community. Though physically feminine (at least in looks and biological anatomy), the Final Girl's victory over the monster represents her ultimate "reimagining" as a figure of surrogate masculinity (107). She represents, in other words, "a congenial double for the adolescent male," acting "feminine enough to act out in a gratifying way, a way unapproved for adult males, the terrors and masochistic pleasures of the underlying fantasy, but not so feminine as to disturb the structures of male competence and sexuality" that must always persevere in the end (51).

The Final Boy, not dissimilarly, also follows suit in his turn from pariah to hero. In *Hills*, this particular transition occurs during a moment of extreme catharsis: when Doug, upon entering the Carter trailer, suffers an immediate shock or psychic wound aptly described by Freud as "war trauma."[152] As Kaja Silverman explains: "Freud implies

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[151] Modleski, Tania. The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Film Theory. New York: Methuen, 1988: 9-13.

[152] See in particular the second chapter of "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." Reprinted as: Freud, Sigmund. Beyond the Pleasure Principle. 1920. Ed. James Strachey. New York: Norton, 1990.

that the subject suffering from a war neurosis constantly relives his traumatic experience as a way of binding those [sensations], and so integrating them harmoniously into his psychic organization….Mastery is at the heart of [this] formation…the male subject—and he is manifestly a male subject—renegotiates his relation to an event by shifting from a passive to an active position" (57).[153] In *The Hills Have Eyes*, the wails of his kidnapped daughter (heard in the distance over a captured walkie-talkie) prove the emotional catalyst by which Bukowski evolves from a passive to active Fury. From a technical standpoint, the lengthy dissolve of the hero gazing pointedly off-camera [Figure 4.2] further reinforces the idea of the Final Boy's ascension and politics of his sacrosanct mission. In a word, Doug's purpose is now figured as divine.

With this in mind, it is easy to suggest—indeed widely expected—that the filmic audience support Doug's revenge. As it is, later on in the film, when Bukowski bludgeons the mutant Pluto (Michael Bailey Smith) with a nearby pick-axe and American flag, the viewer is almost *automatically* compelled to embrace the film's stance on American nationalism as both a powerful (indeed decisive) moral force. Just as in the case of Japan's legendary Mount Suribachi, for Doug, the chance to "raise" the American flag on enemy territory connotes both an allegorical nod at wartime victory and symbolic success of the nation overall [Figure 4.3].

In his seminal study *Nations and Nationalism*, Ernest Gellner described national pride as "primarily a political principle that holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent" when brought to the fore of public expression.[154] In post-9/11 America, such patriotic principles, whether in the form of song, kitsch, or bellicose

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[153] Silverman, Kaja. Male Subjectivity at the Margins. London: Routledge, 1992.
[154] Gellner, Ernest. Nations and Nationalism. Ithaca: Cornell University press, 1983: 1.

Figure 4.2: *The Hills Have Eyes* (Alexandre Aja, 2006): Doug Bukowski on the verge of transformation. (Coutersy of Fox Searchlight Pictures)

Figure 4.3: *The Hills Have Eyes* (Alexandre Aja, 2006): In a nod to Iwo Jima, Bukowski "raises the flag" in enemy territory. (Courtesy of Fox Searchlight Pictures)

rhetoric, routinely colored the cultural landscape red, white and blue, and transformed cinematic titles into visual palimpsests concerned with American solidarity. In *Hills*, both the metallic structure of the Carter's trailer (itself not unlike that of a U.S. military tank) and Bukowski's symbolic repossession of the phallus (whether through use of a screwdriver, pick axe, baseball bat, or gun), epitomizes the film's on-screen nod toward American troops stationed in the mountains of Afghanistan. In addition, thanks to their

guerilla-style tactics and underground lifestyle, Papa Jupiter and his boys, though clearly not examples of Muslim-identifying Al-Qaeda, remain indelible portraits of "cowardly terrorists" who threaten to destroy the nation.

Locating allusions to the War on Terror is but one way in which *Hills* provides a comment on the state of present day America. In the following section, I want to conclude with a look at how 20th Century Fox utilized the technologically-attuned, parenthetically "terrorized" psyche of American society as an extra-diegetic attempt at immersion. Beginning with a study of the film's unique multi-media marketing campaign, this essay shall conclude by linking Aja's traumatic narrative with the tale of U.S. Army Private Jessica Lynch in an attempt to provide a crowning example of the horror film's cultural significance.

Millennial Trauma and the Marketing of Fear

In early 2006, after principal shooting was completed, the *Hills* marketing department decided to move beyond the obligatory television spots and half-minute "teaser" trailers traditionally slotted for primetime audiences. In a highly unprecedented move, Fox Searchlight Pictures launched a then-unprecedented viral marketing campaign consisting of a MySpace page (and one day MySpace "takeover"), a Java-linked video game (followed by its Xbox and PC equivalent), and an interactive "mockumentary" for those seeking insight into the film's "true events." Such expansive publicity, symptomatic of modern society's late-capitalist consumer drive, was also an eerily allegorical gesture in light of the Jessica Lynch and Daniel Pearl media carnivals from

three years before. Critical observers expressed interest in the film's unparalleled bid for publicity. A fact made all the more prominent within the studio's official press release:

> Beginning 12:01 am, tomorrow, Fox Searchlight Pictures will participate in an unprecedented promotion taking over all advertising on MySpace.com, for the new movie, *The Hills Have Eyes*. MySpace.com, the leading social networking and lifestyle portal, is the most widely viewed and highly regarded site of its kind boasting more than 23.1 billion page views and 35.5 million unique users in January alone. The purchase allows the film unparalleled advertising exposure and helps connect site users to the remake of a horror classic.
>
> 'Taking over MySpace, the second most viewed site on the internet, as the exclusive advertiser the day before our film opens is an incredible opportunity and exciting way to celebrate the release of *The Hills Have Eyes*,' said Peter Rice, President of Fox Searchlight Pictures.[155]

The allure of the internet, what with its manifold spectatorship, was the last great frontier for contemporary Hollywood to harness and turn into profit. At a time when virtual communities had steadily overtaken the sphere of "real" human interaction, *The Hills Have Eyes* marketing campaign elided the boundaries between spectator and victim by suggesting that the film was much more than fantasy. For the first time ever, internet

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[155] "The Hills Have Their Eyes on Myspace.com." *newscorp.com*. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 8 March 2006. Web. 28 March 2009.

audiences were invited to go "inside" of the filmic narrative and experience such excitement first-hand. On MySpace, visitors found themselves assaulted by renegade mutants, cacophonous music, and women crying out in plaintive fear. In the non-virtual world, members of the critical community were also privy to synthetic severed ears mailed out—without warning—across the nation. If nothing else, unwitting recipients, such as the *San Francisco Chronicle's* Peter Hartlaub, were moved to prick up theirs ears and applaud *Hills*'s producers for their original (albeit distasteful) marketing gimmick.[156]

The Hills Have Eyes marketing campaign, in its invasive potentiality, capitalized on the cultural anxieties affecting the nation following September 11. If box office sales were any indication, such aggressive domestic marketing struck a powerful chord amongst millions of movie-going Americans. As of March 23, 2007 (the release date for *The Hills Have Eyes 2)*, Aja's stylish update easily doubled its original production costs, grossing well over thirty million dollars domestically.[157] Without question, the film was a hit. Back on the more conventional side of marketing, the film's original poster, released both oversees in Europe and in domestic venues, displayed the blonde and terrified Brenda Carter physically held down by one of her mutant assailants [Figure 4.8]. Such visceral imagery instantly called to mind the (admittedly) nebulous treatment that teenage Army private Jessica Lynch experienced while a prisoner during the 2003 Invasion of Iraq. Lynch, a Palestine, West Virginia native, was part of the U.S. Army's 507th Maintenance Company envoy that was attacked just outside of Nasiriyah on March 23, 2003 in a much publicized military gunfight. Eleven Americans were killed in the assault; six more, including Lynch, were captured as prisoners of war. Diagnosed with two

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[156] Hartlaub, Peter. "*Hills* remake a gruesome, over-the-top thrill ride." *sfgate.com*. San Francisco Chronicle, 10 March 2006. Web. 10 Oct. 2009.
[157] "The Hills Have Eyes." *boxofficemojo.com*. Boxofficemojo, n.d. Web. 10 March 2010.

broken legs and a fractured arm, Lynch, who, according to reports, was allegedly raped by Iraqi servicemen, was eventually placed in the care of medical professionals at Saddam Hospital in downtown Nasiriyah. Mohammed Odeh al Rehaief, an Iraqi lawyer visiting the hospital at the time, claimed to have seen an Iraqi paramilitary officer deliver "two open-handed slaps" to Lynch's face while the latter lay sleeping in her bed. "'I saw them hit the female soldier, and my heart stopped,'" explained Mohammed to *USA Today*.[158] In his testimony, Mohammed would later explain that he walked the six mile distance to an American Marine checkpoint in order to deliver "important information." Days later, Lynch would be rescued and returned to U.S. hands.

In Washington, news of the Rambo-esque raid and dramatic recovery reached all corners of the federal government. President Bush, who had been following the rescue all along, expressed delight at the private's swift return.[159] So too West Virginia Senator Jay Rockefeller, upon whose blessing a spate of candlelight vigils in Lynch's hometown passed as fashionable displays of affect.[160] At the Pentagon, Jim Wilkinson, spokesman for U.S. Army General Franks, offered "complete" satisfaction with the operation's precision and overall valor of the soldiers: "America doesn't leave its heroes behind," he declared, "It never has and it never will."[161] Soon thereafter, a five minute snippet of Lynch's rescue was released to the national media [Figure 4.9]. In the footage, Lynch's frightened expression made for gripping (if sensational) television drama which CNBC's Brian Williams would describe as destined for Hollywood parable.

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[158] Lynch, David J. "Iraqi Lawyer's Tip Led to Rescue of POW." *USA Today* 4 April 2003: 1A.
[159] Dougherty, Hugh and James Langton. "The Saving of Jessica." *The Evening Standard* 2 April 2003: 1-3.
[160] Franks, Jeff, Adrian Croft, and Ben English. "A Nation Rejoices as Face of War is Rescued." *The Daily Telegraph* [Sydney, Australia] 3 Apri 2003: 4.
[161] Bishop, Kate. "Iraq War: Jessica in Safe Hands After Daring Midnight Rescue." *Birmingham Post* [Birmingham, AL] 3 April 2003: 2.

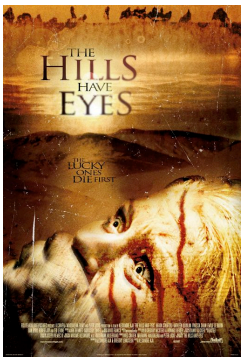

Figure 4.8: Poster for *The Hills Have Eyes* (Alexandre Aja, 2006): Brenda Carter's terrified expression as an allegorical reference to Jessica Lynch.

Jessica Lynch's Rescue

Figure 4.9: Footage of Jessica Lynch's rescue (2003)

In contrast to fellow abductees Edgar Hernandez (a Hispanic male) and Shoshana Johnson (an African-American woman), young Jessica Lynch epitomized a popular fantasy of working class America under duress. As a blue collar citizen, Jessica Lynch represented a vulnerable body crippled by a non-white Other—a belief which many minority spokesmen soon described as tempered "around the edges" by racism.[162] Shoshana Johnson, each complained, just like Lynch, sustained serious wounds in Nasiriyah. Unlike her more celebrated colleague, however (who apparently fainted in the heat of the battle), Johnson attempted to "stave off" her captors even without the aid of shattered ankles. Suffice it to say, such valorous action appeared worthy of national recognition. Yet, as Robert Thompson, media studies professor at Syracuse University, pointed out, in post-9/11 America, the young West Virginian's "good looks and compelling story" fit the exact public profile many U.S. officials were looking for: namely, a vulnerable, white, female subject capable of arousing sympathy.[163]

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[162] Douglas, William. "Looking into the Face of American Heroism." *The Gazette* [Montreal] 10 Nov. 2003: A16.
[163] Douglas, William. "Looking into the Face of American Heroism." *The Gazette* [Montreal] 10 Nov. 2003: A16.

Like it or not, Jessica Lynch was now America's new sweetheart. But she was also, as reports in various media outlets soon suggested, a victim of federal "manipulation."[164] Portrayed by federal personnel and Rick Bragg's biography as a strong-willed "little Girl Rambo," the nineteen-year-old private, in all actuality, was like "a terrified little girl" on the battlefield. [165,166] "I am still confused," announced Lynch, "as to why [federal personnel] chose to lie and tried to make me a legend when the real heroics of my fellow soldiers that day were, in fact, legendary . . . The bottom line is the American people are capable of determining their own ideals for heroes and they don't need to be told elaborate tales."[167] In truth however, "elaborate tales" were exactly what the nation needed to hear.

Post-9/11 America was a nation in flux. Within the country's borders, a gender-specific fantasy of lack and resurrection spoke to the nervous conditions of a traumatized society grappling with the crisis of recovery. Jessica Lynch's abduction epitomized such tumult, moving from imagined emasculation to spectacular *re*cuperation in her televised midnight rescue operation. For many, "victory" was found in Lynch's return to the arms of her parents, an act which suggested the American spirit's resurgence, stronger, and more determined, than ever. And yet the fact remained that American forces had "failed" to prevent Lynch's capture. Here, after all, was a frightened young girl beholden to the whims of the enemy. Like Brenda Carter, Lynch was subjected to any number of ordeals, making her rescue all the more a pyrrhic victory.

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[164] Mcalpine, Joan. "The Less than Patriotic Truth about Jessica's Fable." *The Herald* [Glasgow, UK] 13 Nov. 2003: 16.
[165] Bragg, Rick. I'm A Soldier Too: The Jessica Lynch Story. New York: Vintage, 2004.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Excerpts of Jessica Lynch's testimony before the Congressional Oversight Committee on April 24, 2007.

In the final analysis, what both Jessica Lynch's saga and Aja's filmic narrative both suggest was that modern American culture was still very much plagued by incongruous, because contradictory, gender fantasies. Unlike previous decades, when the crisis of masculinity (ignited by New Left forces or political revolution) enjoyed a stable, if uncanny, resolution (as in the case of 80s era hard-bodied cyborgs), the post-9/11 condition offered no comparable reprieve; thus implying, as echoed in *Hills*'s ominous closing shot—a glimpse of the bloodied survivors (Doug, Brenda, Bobby, and Beast) as viewed through the lens of some unseen observer's binoculars [Figure 4.10]—that the gendered resurrection of American might was but temporary, or delusive, at best.

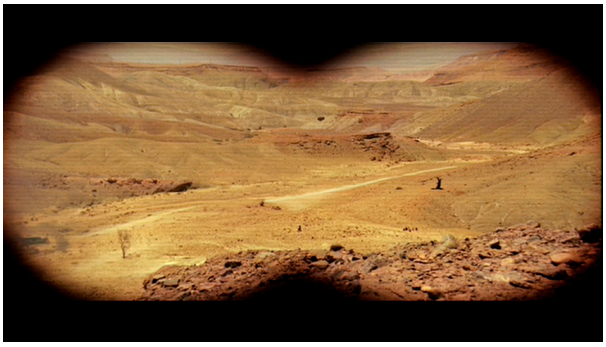

Figure 4.10: *The Hills Have Eyes* (Alexandre Aja, 2006): The film's closing shot. (Courtesy of Fox Searchlight Pictures)

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